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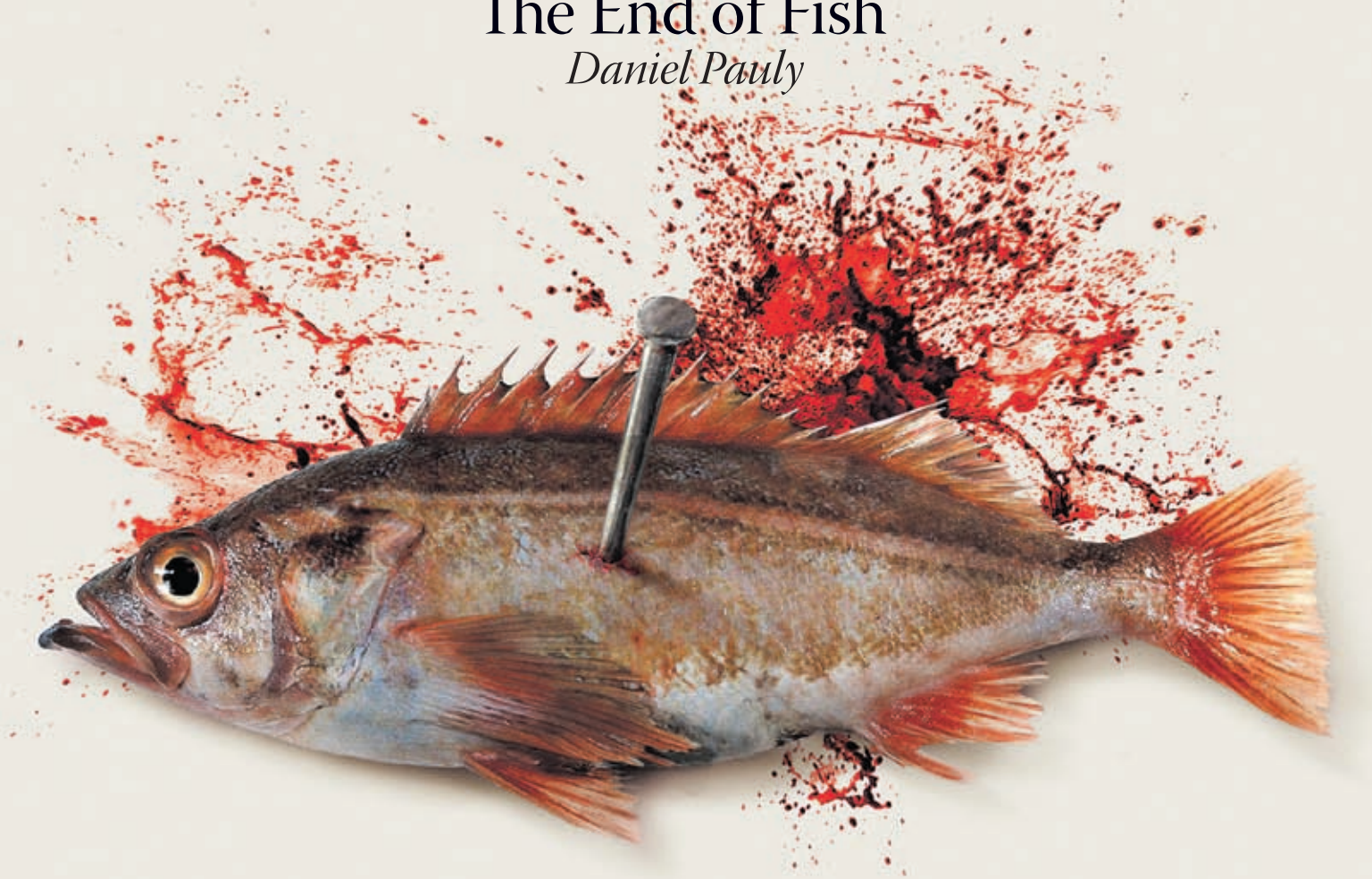
THE ENVIRONMENT ISSUE

AQUACALYPSE NOW

The End of Fish

Daniel Pauly



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THE NEW REPUBLIC

A Journal of Politics and the Arts

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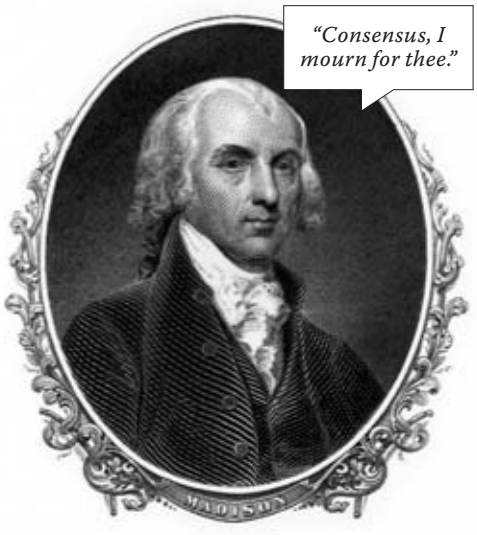
Madison Weeps

"Among the numerous advantages promised by a well-constructed union, none deserves to be more accurately developed than its tendency to break and control the violence of faction," James Madison wrote in *Federalist Number 10*. "The friend of popular governments never finds himself so much alarmed for their character and fate as when he contemplates their propensity to this dangerous vice." Consider us alarmed.

Our sense of alarm has been growing for some time. From the moment Barack Obama entered the White House, the Republican Party has cast itself as the Party of No. Whether it was the stimulus bill—which garnered not a single Republican vote in the House—or the nomination of Sonia Sotomayor to the Supreme Court—which only nine of 40 Senate Republicans supported—the GOP has defined itself in its opposition to Obama. But our alarm has been tempered by the knowledge that, in a way, this is as it should be: In our form of government, the minority party should be the opposition party; and, while the Obama administration did make overtures to the GOP on the stimulus and its selection of Sotomayor, those overtures were largely symbolic. The factionalism, while regrettable, was understandable. But, this week, as the health care reform battle reached a crucial juncture, the violence of faction has become gratuitous.



We refer, of course, to Max Baucus's long-awaited health care reform bill—and the resounding thud with which it landed on Capitol Hill. There are many flaws in Baucus's bill, but there is one thing that can be said for it: It represents as sincere an attempt in recent memory to achieve consensus. For the last three months, Baucus, as chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, worked with five other committee members—two Democrats and three Republicans—to draft legislation that could garner bipartisan support. As the leader of the so-called "Gang of Six," Baucus was the target of frequent criticism from fellow Democrats, who complained that he was taking too long in drafting his legislation or that he was being too solicitous of Republicans. And, while these criticisms had merit, Baucus labored to come up with a bill that represented at least a rough compromise.

In almost Solomonic fashion, Baucus crafted a bill that gives something to—and takes something away from—each faction. Virtually every industry group—from hospitals to drugmakers to device manufacturers to insurers—that faces new fees or budget cuts in the Baucus bill is rewarded with additional revenue from the legislation. And, when it came to winning over Republicans, Baucus went more than halfway: eliminating the public option, strengthening protections against federal funding of abortions, and lowering the legislation's price tag.

And what did all of Baucus's efforts get him? Well, from most key interest groups, outright support or, at the very least, not much indication of outright opposition. But, from one of the two major political parties that, theoretically at least, is supposed to represent many of those interest groups? Absolutely no Republican support—not even from the three GOP members of the Gang of Six, two of whom (Mike Enzi and Chuck Grassley) voiced their outright opposition and one (Olympia Snowe) who remains on the fence.

To be sure, Baucus's bill failed to elicit much in the way of Democratic support, either. Jay Rockefeller, who sits on the Senate Finance Committee, announced that he would vote against Baucus's bill as drafted. But it's not hard to imagine Democratic critics ultimately supporting the bill—especially if, as appears likely, changes are made and Obama encourages them to do so.

Alas, there appears little chance that any Republicans will be similarly moved. Already, Orrin Hatch, the number two Republican on the Senate Finance Committee, is demanding that Democrats "take a deep breath and start over on a truly bipartisan bill"—as if Baucus's legislation was something else entirely. And there is no Republican figure who appears capable of rallying the GOP to the side of health reform.

The Republican reception of Baucus's bill doesn't so much represent a crisis for health care reform as it does a crisis for our system. The GOP is no longer representing interest groups; rather, it has become an interest group itself—and an implacable one. So that a compromise piece of legislation that achieves a rough consensus among the various factions in the debate fails to get even one vote from one of the two major parties.

Where to go from here? Having failed to win over Republicans, Baucus should now labor to win over Democrats. If that means having Massachusetts appoint an interim replacement for Ted Kennedy's seat—or even passing some of the reform through reconciliation—then so be it. If Max Baucus's months of work achieved nothing else, he has unmasked the true nature of the contemporary GOP and, in the process, revealed just how broken our political system has become. ◆

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CORRESPONDENCE

DEFENDING *THE EVOLUTION OF GOD*

THE TITLE OF MY BOOK refers not to biological evolution but to the evolution of the human conception of God. So it's odd that THE NEW REPUBLIC chose a biologist, Jerry A. Coyne, to review the book ("Creationism for Liberals," August 12). But it turns out that Coyne's misplaced expertise wasn't the main problem. Of his many serious misrepresentations of my book, most seem rooted in a simple failure to read it—or read it attentively, at least. Here is a small sample of Coyne's errors. A longer list can be found at www.evolutionofgod.net/coyne.

Misrepresentation #1: The evolution of monotheism. Coyne says I posit a

"relentlessly progressive evolution of religion" and depict "theology's linear march toward goodness and light." (He doesn't provide any quotes from my book that would support this characterization, and there's a reason for that.) He then writes, "One can in fact make a good case that, contrary to Wright's claim, ethics went downhill as religion evolved—specifically, that it declined in the transition from polytheism to monotheism."

An ethical decline in the transition from polytheism to monotheism is *contrary* to my view? I encourage Professor Coyne to dip into Chapters 6 and 7, "From Polytheism to Monolatry" and "From Monolatry to Monotheism." The core argument is that ancient Israel moved from a polytheism that reflected a tolerant cosmopolitanism (sponsored by kings with internationalist foreign policies) to a monotheism that was, at its birth during the Babylonian exile, belligerently intolerant (and whose emergence had been abetted by highly nationalist kings, notably the brutally authoritarian Josiah). I expressly dismiss the common view that monotheism was "morally universalistic from its birth" and characterize the mood that motivated this birth as "closer to hatred than to love, closer to retribution than to compassion." Immediately after the Babylonian exile, I argue, Israel's religion did make moral progress, becoming more tolerant of, even compassionate toward, non-Israelites in neighboring lands. But this isn't a function of monotheism; it reflects the fact that many of Israel's erstwhile enemies were now fellow members of the Persian Empire and so no longer threats. I would have expected the same moral progress had Israel remained polytheistic. (In general, the fitful moral progress I do see in religion over the millennia is driven by this sort of expansion of the scope of social organization.)

Misrepresentation #2: Christian inclusiveness. Coyne says that I cast the Apostle Paul's teachings as "a momentous change in Christian theology: an extension of love to non-Christian foreigners." Wrong again. What I say is that Paul extended love across *ethnic and national bounds*, not religious bounds. In fact, I emphasize that if you read Paul's fine print, you see that "brotherly love" is meant to apply to *Christians* of the various ethnicities and nationalities. I underscore the distinction in such Pauline passages as, "Let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith." I write, "This is the kind of love Paul usually preaches—love directed first and foremost toward other Christians." And I note that, once Christianity became the official Roman church, the line drawn by Paul between Christian and non-Christian became even starker; there was now government-backed "intolerance of non-Christians. So, in moral terms, it isn't clear that Paul's mission culminated in progress." So, when Coyne spends a paragraph triumphantly establishing that "Paul is not promoting love among those of different faiths," and says that this fact

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Left-Handed Compliment

Why can't liberals accept victory?

JONATHAN CHAIT

If health care reform passes, will it be a grand historical achievement, or a crushing disappointment? The answer, I predict, will be both. The American health care system is an indefensible morass of waste and cruelty. The distance between the status quo and the ideal is therefore so vast that we could—and probably will—end up with a reform that massively improves the system, while coming nowhere close to the ideal.

Which basis of comparison will prevail? In the long run, obviously, the substantive merit of the legislation is what counts. But, over the next few years, President Obama's political capital will hinge in part on whether Americans see health care reform as genuine progress or a political fig leaf. And his biggest foe in the perception battle seems to be the liberals.

That's what happened in the aftermath of the economic-stimulus package. Indeed, the contours of that episode strikingly resemble the health care debate. Obama began with hopes of winning broad bipartisan consensus for a sweeping overhaul. But staunch GOP opposition and the fecklessness of moderate Democrats forced him to scale back both his political and policy ambitions. Ultimately, he eked out a partisan bill, which moderates scaled back for no coherent reason other than to burnish their own centrist credentials.

As a matter of policy, the stimulus still represented a major success. The law signed by Obama is massive. Yet a bizarre disconnect has opened up between economists and everybody else. As numerous articles have shown, economists believe almost unanimously that the stimulus has provided a significant boost. Polls, though, show most people think it either has done nothing or has hurt the economy. Republicans have pounced, waving around proposals to cancel the stimulus.

Why did Obama's substantive triumph turn into a political liability? One reason is that the Keynesian intellectual basis for the stimulus is harder to explain than the intuitive (but wrong) gut reaction that when times are tight, the government should tighten its belt, too. Another is that joblessness has continued to rise, and explaining that it would have risen more quickly without the stimulus is tricky.

But, surely, a third factor came into play: the almost total lack of approving commentary. Liberals like Paul Krugman and, um, me devoted nearly all of their efforts to demanding a bigger and better stimulus. That sort of constructive criticism is necessary. It's certainly cathartic as well, given the maddening stupidity of the centrist compromises, which removed the most effective parts of the stimulus for the sake of meeting arbitrary round numbers. Yet this left a landscape in which one side was attacking the stimulus as a socialistic outrage, and the other was attacking it as a feeble half-measure. No wonder the public turned against it.

Health care, alas, seems to be following the same track. My liberal friends seem convinced either that Congress will reject health care reform, or that it will pass a meaningless palliative. The main exception among this admittedly unrepresentative sample consists of liberals who study health care reform for a living and those (like me) who regularly communicate with them. These wonks (and wonk acquaintances) all think Obama will sign a historic health care bill. Sadly, the wonk cohort is starkly outnumbered.

So, it's worth pointing out that, for all the flaws of the process, Obama appears to be on track to sign one of the towering social reforms in American history—the most important change in our social contract since at least 1965, or (I'd argue) even longer. Even the most conservative of the bills working its way through Congress would regulate the health insurance market to prevent the discriminatory practices that ruin the lives of the sick and make vulnerable workers fear to change jobs or strike out on their own. It would start to rationalize the practice of medicine and slow the explosive growth in costs that have gobbled up any growth in wages for many years. (The establishment of the Independent Medicare Advisory Commission, charged with targeting wasteful practices, would constitute a massive reform on its own.)

And, of course, every bill would establish a practical entitlement to health care. The extent of the coverage remains weak. But remember that the original Social Security Act not only offered meager provisions and no disability benefit—Got hurt in the factory and couldn't work? Tough luck—it also excluded nearly half of the working population, including most women and African Americans. The important point was setting a new societal expectation of what constituted basic economic rights, which, over time, would be filled in so that the reality met the promise. Fifty years from now, the notion that people would die from lack of access to medical treatment, or lose their homes and life savings because they got sick, will seem as barbaric and foreign as the notion of the elderly dying in poverty did after the establishment of Social Security.

So why are liberal activists, bloggers, and even members of Congress so sullen? First, they think anything that has the support of the insurance industry must be bad policy. And, while it's true that the interests of insurers and the interest of good policy work at cross-purposes, they aren't mutually exclusive. Insurers want government to cover the uninsured, and they are willing to cut some fat from their profit margin to tap into that new customer base.

Second, liberal health care activists have come to fixate on the public option as the end-all, be-all of reform. "If Barack Obama's health care plan gets changed to exclude a public option like Medicare, then it is not health care reform," insists Howard Dean. "Legislation rises and falls on whether the American public is allowed to choose a universally available public option or not." It's worth recalling that Dean's own health care plan from 2004 did not include a public option. Most liberal health care wonks think a public option is helpful but not vital. Maybe they've all been bought off by the insurance industry, but I doubt it. If anybody sees Jonathan Cohn tooling around in a new Bentley, let me know, and I'll reconsider.

Liberal Democrats in Congress understand that they won't have any leverage unless they can credibly claim to vote against reform that falls short of their ideal. This requires them to say things like "health care reform without a public plan is not reform." It becomes a problem if enough people actually believe their own bluff. ◆

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From Washington

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The Mall

Color Bind

Yes, some of Obama's critics are probably racist. So what?

Is Joe Wilson a racist? Many people in Washington seem to think the answer is yes—and that it helps explain the congressman's impolitic yelp of "You lie!" during Obama's recent address on health care. Maureen Dowd encapsulated the good-thinking wisdom on Wilson last week, writing, "Some people just can't believe a black man is President and will never accept it."

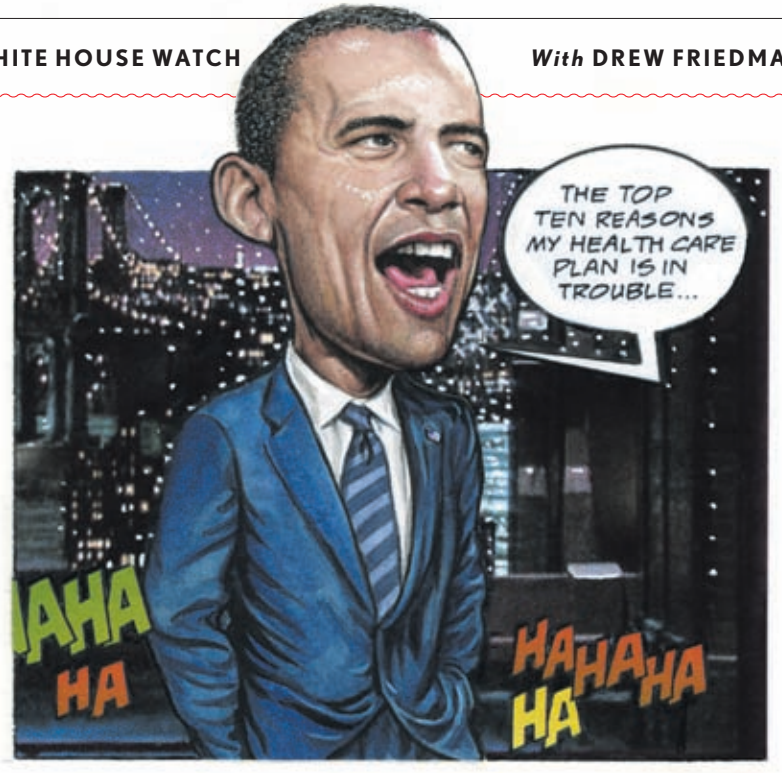
It is just a feeling, of course, but, in my bones, I think Dowd is probably right. My intuition comes partly from the unprecedented nature of his outburst—after all, there is one particular way in which Obama differs from all preceding presidents, and I'm not talking about his belief in a public option—and partly from the history of the state Wilson represents, replete as it is with racial politics of the ugliest kind.

And yet, even if Dowd and I are correct that Wilson's outburst was motivated by dislike for blacks, I'm not entirely sure that I, or anyone else, should care. Consider a hypothetical: Wilson, we can presume, would have been pleased as punch if the new black president were a Republican and were up at the podium singing the praises of small government and sending immigrants back to where they came from. This thought experiment does not exonerate Wilson of the charge of racism; what it *does* mean is that we are talking about a racism more complicated than the bigotries of old, a racism intertwined with other brands of animus (against liberals, against Democrats, against elites) to an extent we can only speculate about. Furthermore, it's a kind of racism whose perpetrators usually do not consciously recognize it in themselves, and would heartily resist owning up to it if presented with the charge. Given that so much anti-Obama sentiment of late (from Wilson, from the tea-partiers, from others on the right) seems to owe something to this subtle, complicated type of bigotry—and given that Democrats have begun to take notice and express alarm—I think it's worth pausing and asking: Is racism this subsidiary and elusive really worth getting exercised about?

For a long time, we have been told that subliminal racism is the warp and woof of America. The press has made much of implicit-association tests, which reveal that a majority of test takers are slower to associate black people with various positive words than white ones. Researchers such as A.G. Greenwald and L.H. Krieger have extrapolated from this that America suffers from a plague of subliminal racism, which leads to negative behaviors directed at people of color.

The actual literature on the subject, however, is much more ambiguous and much less pessimistic than we are often told. A recent study in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* by Hart Blanton and colleagues showed that, in an experiment where 90 percent of implicit-association-test-takers were slower to associate positive words with blacks, more than 70 percent of the subjects exhibited—when it came to their actual behavior—biases *in favor of* a black test administrator as opposed to a white one. Thus, a great many people have negative unconscious assumptions about blacks—and yet are inclined to treat black people better than whites. However one processes these findings, it is unclear that they are a coherent basis for agonized discussions of America as a country shot through with racist abuse.

WHITE HOUSE WATCH *With* **DREW FRIEDMAN**



When TV gigs didn't sway moderate Republicans, Obama tried stupid pet tricks.

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One might reply that such racism is still a problem because it could signal a possible slide backward into the open, destructive racism of old. But where is the evidence in this country, over the last 50 years, of such a backslide? A realistic assessment of that question should include a look at today's teenagers, who will be in their thirties with kids of their own very soon—and whose attitudes on race are markedly tolerant.

That subliminal racism plays a part in some people's criticisms of our president is being addressed as a problem. I would argue that it is more realistically observed as a fact, one that is unlikely to be completely absent in any human society. We have outlawed deliberate segregation and discrimination. We have rendered bigotry socially incorrect, to the extent that it now lies somewhere between smoking and pedophilia. Can we do more than this? Do we need to?

Dismissing the proposal to admonish Wilson formally for his outburst, Barney Frank quipped, "I don't have time to monitor everyone's civility." Frank is right. It is certainly not pretty that some people's take on Obama is likely mediated by racism. But the phenomenon is less a matter of open bigotry than a breach of civility. Who ever thought that all people would be civil at all times? And who ever thought, given the inherent imperfectability of humankind, that racism is somehow different from our other flaws and could be subject to complete elimination?

No one pens doorstop volumes announcing that mosquitoes still exist. We know they do, and we assume they always will, because life isn't perfect. The issue is how close to perfect we can expect to get. Surely, health care, two wars overseas, and a deeply ailing economy are more important than mosquitoes—or whether some people's feelings about Barack Obama are less than, yes, civil.

John McWhorter

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Hawk Down

Why Joe Biden flipped on Afghanistan.

With the 2008 presidential campaign in full swing two summers ago, Joe Biden, then making his own bid for the White House, ridiculed Barack Obama on a momentous issue: Afghanistan. The occasion was an August 2007 speech by Obama outlining his plans to fight Al Qaeda, which included sending an influx of American troops and aid to the country. Later that day, Biden issued a snarky press release gloating about his own extensive record of pushing similar policies, and which cast Obama as a naïve newcomer. The release noted that the Delaware senator had co-authored the first law authorizing reconstruction aid to the country after the 2001 U.S. invasion and that Biden had recently been pushing both for more money and for more boots on the ground. "Biden Campaign Congratulates Sen. Obama for Johnny Come Lately Position," the release quipped.

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For additional political coverage by Michael Crowley and other TNR editors, visit **THE PLANK** *at www.tnr.com*

Biden's pique was easy to understand. From his perch as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he had long cautioned the Bush administration against giving short shrift to Afghanistan. Even before Obama announced his run for president, Biden was warning that Afghanistan, not Iraq, was the "central front" in the war against Al Qaeda, requiring a major U.S. commitment. "Whatever it takes, we should do it," Biden said in February 2002. "History will judge us harshly if we allow the hope of a liberated Afghanistan to evaporate because we failed to stay the course."

But, now that Biden addresses Obama not as Johnny but as "Mr. President," things have changed. In internal White House Afghanistan policy debates, Biden has been a voice of skepticism. When Obama's national security team first considered a troop increase for Afghanistan in March, Biden circulated a document that outlined alternatives to a major escalation. Although the White House won't provide precise details, aides acknowledge that Biden urged the president to consider a narrow counterterrorism mission, heavy on Special Forces and Predator drone strikes, which would require far less manpower than the military was seeking. Obama ultimately sided with other administration officials arguing for a larger counterinsurgency operation, and approved 4,000 more troops on the heels of the 17,000 he'd dispatched in February. But Biden continues to argue that it may not be possible to defeat the Taliban and stabilize Afghanistan at a reasonable cost. His newfound skepticism is not only a story about dashed hopes in Afghanistan. It is also a story of how a leading liberal hawk found realism in the Hindu Kush.

During the 1990s, Joe Biden emerged as one of the Democratic Party's chief foreign policy spokesmen, a strong proponent of the idea that U.S. military power could be used unapologetically for altruistic purposes. He was a strong advocate for military intervention in the Balkans, for instance, and, despite some doubts, he supported the 2002 resolution authorizing the use of military force against Iraq and even defended the wisdom of the invasion for several years. "There are some really bright guys and women in my party who underestimate the transformative capability of military power, when coupled with a rational policy that is both preventative and nation-building in nature," Biden told *The New Yorker* in March of 2005. But the transformative power of military-backed nation-building is just what Biden is now coming to doubt in Afghanistan.

People familiar with Biden's shift in thinking say it has many roots. But none is more apparent or vivid than his disillusionment with the Afghan president, Hamid Karzai. Soon after Karzai took office in December 2001, Biden traveled to Kabul and, over lunch on two successive days, clicked with the new leader. "They took to each other very well," says a former Biden aide. Impressed, Biden argued that Karzai deserved America's full support, even as Bush officials questioned whether the Afghan was capable of establishing a strong central government.

Within a couple of years, however, Biden was criticizing Karzai's candor and leadership. Nothing shook his faith quite as much as what you might call the Karzai dinners. The first occurred in February 2008, during a fact-finding trip to Afghanistan that Biden took with fellow senators John Kerry and Chuck Hagel. Dining on platters of rice and lamb at the heavily fortified presidential palace in Kabul, Biden and his colleagues grilled Karzai about reports of corruption and the growing opium trade in the country, which the president disingenuously denied. An increasingly

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impatient Biden challenged Karzai's assertions until he lost his temper. Biden finally stood up and threw down his napkin, declaring, "This meeting is over," before he marched out of the room with Hagel and Kerry. It was a similar story nearly a year later. As Obama prepared to assume the presidency in January, he dispatched Biden on a regional fact-finding trip. Again Biden dined with Karzai, and, again, the meeting was contentious. Reiterating his prior complaints about corruption, Biden warned Karzai that the Bush administration's kid-glove treatment was over; the new team would demand more of him.

Biden's revised view of Karzai was pivotal. Whereas he had once felt that, with sufficient U.S. support, Afghanistan could be stabilized, now he wasn't so sure. "He's aware that a basic rule of counterinsurgency is that you need a reliable local partner," says one person who has worked with Biden in the past. The trip also left Biden wondering about the clarity of America's mission. At the White House, he told colleagues that "if you asked ten different U.S. officials in that country what their mission was, you'd get ten different answers," according to a senior White House aide. He was also growing increasingly concerned about the fate of Pakistan. Biden has been troubled by the overwhelmingly disproportionate allocation of U.S. resources to Afghanistan in comparison to Pakistan, a ratio one administration official measures as 30:1. Indeed, before leaving the Senate last year, Biden authored legislation that would triple U.S. non-military aid to Islamabad to $1.5 billion per year. (House-Senate bickering has tied up the plan for months, and Biden has recently been working the phones to broker a compromise.)

Biden is also likely moved by the doubts of influential friends and advisers. The former Biden aide notes that the vice president carefully considers the opinions of the now-retired Hagel, who, like Biden, is a longtime multilateralist. "They share a similar worldview," says the former aide. Hagel, a veteran of the Vietnam war, has recently likened Afghanistan to that conflict. In a *Washington Post* op-ed earlier this month, Hagel counseled Obama to listen to phone recordings of Lyndon Johnson telling Senator Richard Russell that he knew Vietnam could not be won but that he didn't want to be the first president to lose a war.

Soon after Biden returned to Washington from his January visit to Kabul, the Obama team began its debate on Afghanistan. Some powerful officials—including Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Afghanistan point man Richard Holbrooke—argued that the president should approve a substantial troop increase that would enable a broad counterinsurgency campaign to defeat the Taliban and stabilize the country. Biden emerged as a leading voice of doubt. Even if such a project could succeed, he argued, it wasn't clear that the massive cost—perhaps hundreds of billions of dollars and untold human lives—would be justified. Biden also worries about politics. In private, his friends in Congress have been forcefully reiterating their publicly expressed doubts about the prospects for success in Afghanistan. As one who

While visiting troops in Afghanistan, Joe Biden had a series of awkward dinners with President Hamid Karzai that lessened his faith in the war.

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has seen nearly 20 election cycles since he came to Washington in 1973, Biden has taken care to remind administration officials that the politics of foreign policy can't be ignored, and that Capitol Hill opinions will invariably shape war policy.

Biden's doubts about Afghanistan have been leaking to the press for months. Although his staff denies pushing such stories, they do serve a p.r. purpose for a president redefining the way U.S. foreign policy is crafted in the post-Bush era. Biden is cast here as an anti-Cheney—a devil's advocate in policy debates who tries to ensure that hard questions don't go overlooked. "He has long seen his role, and the president values it, to play the skeptic," says one senior White House aide.

When it comes to Afghanistan, Biden's skepticism represents a surprising departure from the ambitious belief in American power he honed during the 1990s. While many other Democrats have recently adopted a more cautious, realist worldview, it's clear that the likes of Clinton and Holbrooke remain confident that the United States can prevail in Afghanistan at an acceptable cost. Clinton may even see the conflict in moral terms: Shortly after the U.S. invasion in 2001, she publicly argued that the United States should democratize Afghanistan in part to liberate its oppressed women. Women's rights, she argued, "are universal values which we have a responsibility to promote throughout the world, and especially in a place like Afghanistan." Those are the words of a liberal hawk, a label that may no longer fit Biden so snugly. Whatever doubts he may be expressing, Biden doesn't support giving up on Afghanistan entirely. "He is not for withdrawal," says a senior White House aide.

Nor is he the only person in either the White House or the military to doubt the wisdom of escalation; rather, the debate involves "a continuum" of opinions, according to another senior aide. Indeed, it seems entirely possible that Obama will eventually come around to Biden's way of thinking. Just don't expect another "Johnny come lately" press release if he does.

Michael Crowley

Earth to Obama

You can't negotiate with the planet.

It's been a long year—Barack Obama has faced, in rough order, John McCain, global financial collapse, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the Blue Dogs, the Progressive Caucus, the Gang of Six, Glenn Beck, Representative Joe Wilson (R-Hissy), and the third of Republicans convinced he was born somewhere else. Of course, minus the birth certificates, roughly the same has been true for Hu Jintao and Nicolas Sarkozy, for Angela Merkel and Manmohan Singh. That's what politics is—a series of challenges, which are rarely won or lost completely. You get part of what you wanted (everyone with health insurance), and maybe you leave other stuff for another day (the public option). That's why we call politics the pursuit of the possible.

And it's why the next big issue on the agenda is totally, scarily different. Assuming that the health care fracas eventually ends, Washington will tackle the president's other great priority for his administration—energy and climate. The House has already approved the Waxman-Markey cap-and-trade bill, and a Senate version is expected at month's end. Even if Congress drags its feet, Obama will visit China in mid-November to likely conclude a bilateral pact that will set the stage for the huge Copenhagen climate conference in December. It promises to be one more big fight.

But, throughout the process, as industry and environmentalists, Chinese and Indians, Americans and Europeans push and prod each other, another more important negotiation will be going on behind the scenes. That negotiation features human beings—led more by Obama than anyone else on the planet—against physics and chemistry. It's not going to be enough to strike a deal with Beijing or Delhi, to meet in the middle on some mutually plausible scheme. A deal has to be struck with the climate itself, and the climate is unlikely to haggle.

In the summer of 2007, sea ice in the Arctic began to melt dramatically, many decades ahead of the schedule that scientists had previously predicted. Before the summer was out, there was about a quarter less ice at the pole than ever before in human history. That scared scientists, who began revising their calculations of how fast we would need to move to stay ahead of global warming. And this growing understanding has, in turn, changed the political demands on policymakers very dramatically. Obama, for instance, had initially campaigned on a pledge to reduce U.S. carbon emissions 80 percent by mid-century, and the Waxman-Markey legislation was designed to, more or less, meet that goal. All of a sudden, that target didn't seem like enough to meet the demands of the new science—researchers were now throwing around numbers like 40 percent cuts by 2020 in the developed world, which would require not a speedy conversion to renewable energy, but a forced march reminiscent of the rapid buildup at the start of World War II. On a global scale, the old goal—still embraced by the Obama administration—was to aim for a planet where atmospheric carbon dioxide topped out at 450 parts per million (ppm), and the temperature didn't rise more than two degrees Celsius. Under the old estimates, that would have been enough to stave off "catastrophic change." But what 2007 showed was that our current level of 390 ppm and a one-degree rise in temperature was enough to melt the Arctic. And it wasn't just the Arctic—scientists were reporting that high-altitude glaciers, flood and drought cycles, and even the chemistry of seawater were all showing the same kind of ahead-of-schedule change. In January of 2008, NASA's James Hansen—at the very least, the most prestigious climatologist employed by the U.S. government—released a paper setting a new target for staving off catastrophe: 350 ppm. It was embraced that year by Al Gore and, this August, by the chairman of the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Rajendra Pachauri. That is, the two men who have been awarded Nobel prizes for their work on global warming say that we need to be aiming for far lower emission levels than what Washington currently intends.

So here's the politics. In Washington, and in Copenhagen, political realism dictates reaching some kind of deal. And the pressure from vested interests—mostly the fossil-fuel lobby—combined with the political fear of annoying voters with higher gas prices or lifestyle shifts means that the incentive for anyone who has to run for office anytime soon is to take the easiest possible deal. Look at Waxman-Markey, which has been revised to cut emissions just 17 percent by 2020—and even that comes loaded with loopholes written to win over particular congressmen with particular coal mines. And it barely passed—by seven votes. Scientific realism demands much more.

ANTHONY RUSSO

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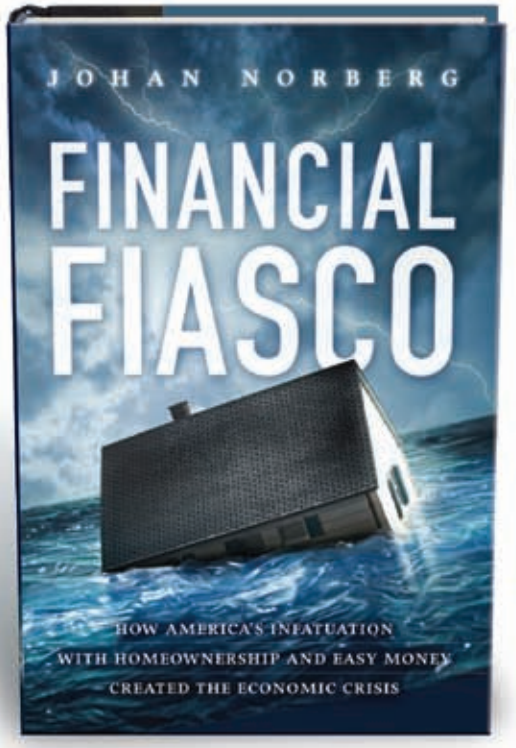
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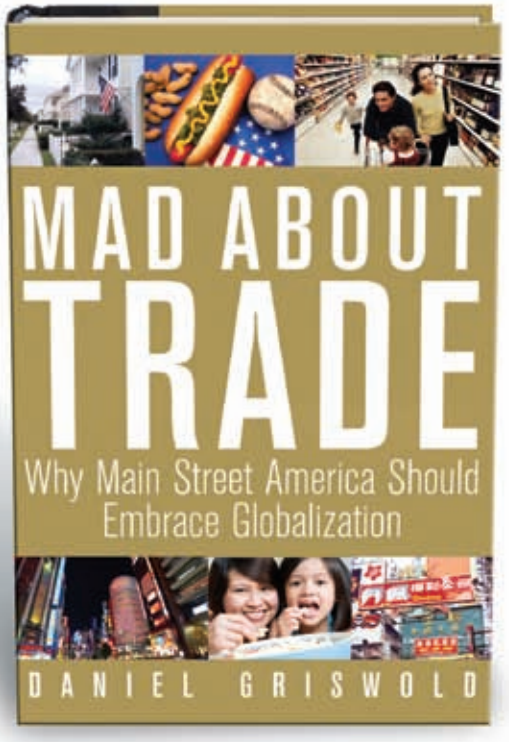

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Will Barack Obama push for a climate policy that has a realistic hope of working? Or will he accept ineffectual half-measures?

And scientific realism holds the trump card here. If you pass half a health care bill, you can always come back in a decade. People will suffer in the meantime, but it won't grow impossible to fix the problem: The Clinton debacle in the 1990s didn't mean that we couldn't try again this year. But, if we don't do what the science requires on climate change, the situation will get badly out of hand. In the last two years, methane levels in the atmosphere have begun to spike sharply, apparently because warming temperatures are now melting the permafrost that caps large deposits of the potent greenhouse gas. If we let the planet keep warming, we won't be able to shut that cycle off—we're clearly much closer to that kind of tipping point than we imagined just a few years ago. Half a job may not be better than no job at all.

It's an excruciating set of choices—one that has divided environmentalists on the Waxman-Markey legislation. The best case for swallowing hard and accepting an insufficient bill comes from Fred Krupp, longtime head of the Environmental Defense Fund. His argument: Our emissions reduction goals are critically important, but the most important thing is to get started now. If we set the ball in motion, industry will quickly find that it's cheaper than it thinks to move toward clean energy, and the ball will roll far faster than politicians expect. Case in point: the reductions of sulfur dioxide under the Clean Air Act, which turned out to be far cheaper than opponents had predicted—even Bush 43 kept right on pushing for deeper cuts, because there was no real reason not to. And, if we don't get started now, Krupp warns, "if our young people, who best understand the science and the urgency, refrain from calling for Congress to promptly take the first step," then no legislation will pass and "we may not have as good a chance until 2013." By which point a lot more ice will have turned to water and flowed under the bridge.

On the other hand, carbon isn't exactly like sulfur—one required a new filter on your smokestack, the other requires replacing the fossil fuels at the heart of our economy. (Not many folks are addicted to sulfur dioxide, but all of us at some level run on coal and gas and oil.) Of course, Krupp is right about one thing—given how hard it has been to build support even for this watered-down bill, starting again does risk losing everything. But the reason we're in the predicament is pretty simple: the environmental movement, with some noble exceptions, has concentrated too heavily on Beltway lobbying, not on the kind of movement-building that could create a constituency large and vocal enough to

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motivate members of Congress to support something better.

That's a mistake we don't dare repeat as we head for the Copenhagen conference in December, a negotiation whose complexity—and significance—will make even Waxman-Markey seem simple by comparison. For one thing, even if the half-a-loaf argument sways American environmentalists, Copenhagen will be hard going for those proposing baby steps. There's a solid block of countries that will be pushing for more. Eighty-nine governments have embraced the 350 ppm target, albeit the smallest and most vulnerable nations on earth. A number of them see it as matter of survival—I was in The Maldives recently when President Mohammed Nasheed declared that a pact like the one envisioned by the West was a "death warrant" for his nation, which lies just a meter or two above sea level. Not only are the poor nations of the world demanding compensation for the damage we've caused, and expensive technical assistance to help them build a renewable energy future ("Trillions of dollars might not be enough" for Africa alone, the acting director of the African Union's economy and agriculture department said in August), but they're also asking for truly steep cuts in Western emissions to head off warming so great that they won't be capable of adaptation at any price. Governments will try to finesse these huge gulfs. At the moment, for instance, some drafts of the Copenhagen treaty describe 350 ppm as "a shared vision" even if the actual steps required by the treaty would fall far short.

But, in the end, even a remotely plausible outcome is going to demand more leadership than we've seen so far. It has to come from two places. The first, as I have mentioned, is the citizenry. That's why many of us have volunteered over the last year to build a global movement—350.org—that calls for hewing much closer to the demands of both science and justice, and which may now have spread farther than any similar environmental movement in the past.

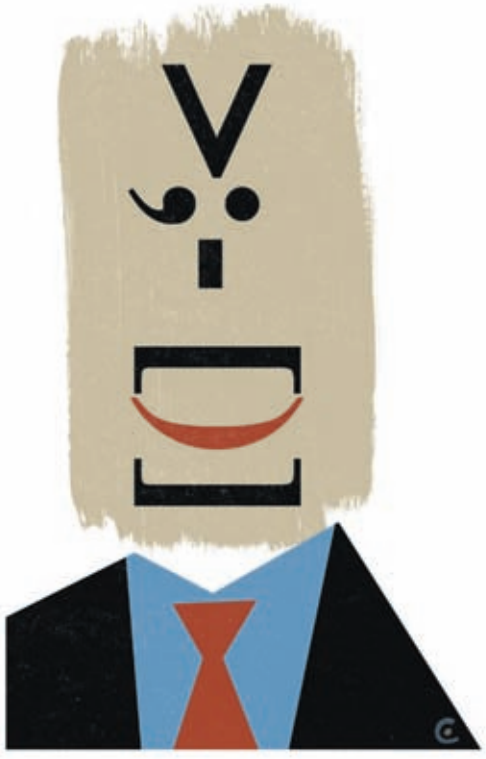
We also need leadership from the Obama administration. The president has recently concentrated on health care, but he's made it clear that the other priority for his administration will be energy and climate. It will take more than any one speech he could deliver—he'll need to campaign. Fire up Air Force One for a daylong whirl from Barrow in Alaska to McMurdo Sound in the Antarctic, with a stop in New Orleans on the way there and the Amazon on the way home. And, even if he does make this a priority, there's still the question of how hard he will push—whether he'll be talking old science (450 ppm) or the new, harder targets (350 ppm).

Alas, there will be no political imperative driving him to push for the toughest measures. He's already done more on global warming than the previous four presidents combined. He's not going to lose large numbers of votes for going easy on climate targets; if anything, the opposite will happen.

On the other hand, there are legacies, and then there are legacies. If, as many scientists believe, we're at the last possible moment to make a major turn, then Obama's decision may resonate in geological time. Eight months has been enough to teach us that Obama is a political realist, always unwilling to make the perfect the enemy of the good. What we'll find out soon is if he's a scientific realist, too, and therefore willing to make the necessary the enemy of the convenient.

Bill McKibben

Bill McKibben wrote the first book for a general audience on climate change, The End of Nature, in 1989. A scholar-in-residence at Middlebury College, he is co-founder of 350.org.



Pajamas Government

The blogosphere's man in Congress.

The congressman is nearly in tears—his face crumpled and voice cracking. This was hardly the response that I anticipated when I asked freshman Democrat Alan Grayson a banal question about adjusting to life in his new job. "Personally, it's extremely difficult for me to be away from my family," he started. That's when he started to swell. As he came unglued, I cast a nervous glance at his aide. The least she could do was hustle him from this awkwardness. But she just fidgeted with her PDA, as if this wasn't his first outpouring.

For the record, this was the first of five times that he would choke up during our 70-minute interview.

The congressman from Disney World is something of a cult hero—a darling of the liberal blogosphere. A few years back, he was known for cruising around his Orlando district in a Cadillac with a bumper sticker that blared, "Bush Lied, People Died." And, as a member of Congress, he has taken a series of strong positions that have made him a tribune of *The Huffington Post* set and a YouTube sensation. He has voted against supplemental funds for both the Iraq and Afghanistan wars—and hurled invectives at Ben Bernanke, when the Fed chair testified on the Hill. "Is it safe to say that nobody in 1913 contemplated that your small little group of people would decide to hand out half a trillion dollars to foreigners?" Grayson snarked to the central banker.

His brief tenure in Congress is a novel experiment. Other members of Congress have shared the liberal blogosphere's ideological predispositions. But Grayson is the first member to bring the blogosphere's in-your-face style to Capitol Hill. It has made for one of the more, well, interesting clashes of cultures in recent congressional history.

The blogosphere is the medium of the outsider—the self-consciously rambunctious truth-teller holding the dissembling establishment to account. That's the very essence of Alan Grayson, the way he tells it. A kid from the Bronx, he raced through Harvard in three years, paying his way by literally cleaning toilets. Running a calling-card company

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and making a wise investment in the Indonesian franchise of KFC helped make him independently wealthy.

Yet he felt the pull of politics. And, with his Harvard law degree, he became a specialist in using the False Claims Act to represent whistleblowers suing companies suspected of defrauding the government. More than that, he became a specialist in suing contractors deployed in Iraq. He won a ruling against the security firm Custer Battles, which had overcharged the government, for a $10 million triumph (though squabbling over that number has continued in the courts). *Vanity Fair* profiled his efforts to redress what he then called "the crime of the century," and *The Wall Street Journal* described him as "waging a one-man war against contractor fraud in Iraq." (Another of his clients sued her employer, a defense contractor, that she alleged had failed to provide protection against bird poop in Iraq. "It was like snow. You could shovel it," the plaintiff told the *St. Petersburg Times*.)

His Iraq work, however, provided Grayson with ample leitmotifs for his 2008 run for Congress—his second try. His ads in some ways resembled a rap video: pulsing music, flashy editing, with Grayson standing next to a briefcase full of cash in an empty airplane hangar. Only Grayson wasn't bragging about all of his gouda—he was promising to jail the greedy war profiteers who stole it from the government. Blogger Howie Klein began posting the ad on his blog *Down With Tyranny*, as well as on *Daily Kos* and *The Huffington Post*. The video went viral. "Hell yeah, that's the kind of ad all Democrats should be running," one commenter posted to the YouTube thread. "Grayson freakin ROCKS!" said another.

Shortly after taking office, Grayson—recognizable on the Hill for his 6'4" frame, which fills his pinstripe suits and flamboyantly mismatched shirts and ties—began making opposition to the bankers and regulators who precipitated last year's financial collapse the signature issue of his first term. He poached Matt Stoller, co-founder of the *OpenLeft* site and one of the netroots' most prominent liberal bloggers, to advise him on financial services. "Usually I have to push candidates to become more aggressive," Stoller wrote on his blog after meeting Grayson, "in Grayson's case, he pushed me." He has relished providing tongue-lashings to the likes of Timothy Geithner or Citigroup CEO Vikram Pandit. His grilling of Federal Reserve Inspector General Elizabeth Coleman was watched more than one million times on YouTube.

And, to his credit, his argument has taken hold—a Federal Reserve audit bill, once relegated to the margins of the Ron Paul fanatics, now has about 100 Democratic co-sponsors in the House. According to *Politico*, Barney Frank is now working with the sponsors of the bill to achieve more openness in the Fed. It's a development that pretty clearly wouldn't have happened without Grayson.

If Grayson's videos have become Internet hits, they weren't exactly random phenomena. His staff likes to upload them—and then make him available to discuss them on blogs like *Firedoglake* with commenters named "beerfart liberal" and "cocktailhag." Unlike other politicians, whose appearances on the sites only serve to highlight that they come from another planet, Grayson speaks their language. He even speaks their language when addressing the mainstream media—his public statements are rife with splenetic rhetoric and zingers. For example: "Rush Limbaugh is a has-been hypocrite loser, who craves attention. . . . Limbaugh actually was more lucid when he was a drug addict. If America ever did one percent of what he wanted us to do, then we'd all need painkillers."

The curse of bloggers is that they can never turn off. There's always another post to write, another enemy to engage. And even sympathetic colleagues have begun to fret about Grayson's work ethic and the energy required for maintaining such a steady state of high dudgeon. "He works late at night, early in the morning, and I'm just saying, you got to have some balance," Representative Corrine Brown told me.

But the bigger problem is that his method may be ill-suited to his Central Florida constituents. Before his victory, Republicans had held his seat for 24 years. And now, voters don't quite seem to know what to make of the new guy. Only about one-third of Grayson's constituents view him favorably, according to one poll, and Republicans are already treating his district like one of the easiest pickoffs for the 2010 midterms. Of course, Grayson isn't the type to roll over. He has an impressive personal war chest that his comrades in the blogosphere will likely help him fill—and the type of self-righteousness that keeps a man soldiering forward. When I asked him about his motivation, he cited the Book of Deuteronomy. "Justice, justice, ye shall seek," he intoned. It was an answer that moved him to the brink of tears.

Marin Cogan

Rich Dem, Poor Dem

Class war in Obamaland.

The health care debate has exposed the ideological tension in Barack Obama's political coalition between moderates and liberals. But it has also offered hints of how another, less obvious divide built into the Democratic majority could wreak havoc on the administration during the years to come.

In 2008, the Democratic Party blossomed into a successful alliance of the upscale and the downscale—wealthy and needy marching hand in hand, sharing animosity to George W. Bush and the war in Iraq. The extent to which Democrats are relying on the far extremes of the income spectrum is striking. Democrats have generally performed well among low-income voters in the past, but now, the phenomenon has become more pronounced. Voters from households making less than $30,000 backed Obama by 31 points last November. That margin was 13 points higher than Jimmy Carter's advantage over Gerald Ford with poor voters in 1976—and 21 points better than Walter Mondale's advantage among the same demographic in 1984.

Democratic gains among the rich have been even more dramatic and, given the party's history, surprising. Carter in 1976 and Mondale in 1984 were crushed by the wealthiest voters. Obama, by contrast, actually carried those making $200,000 or more by 6 points. True, these very affluent voters make up only 6 percent of the electorate, but Obama fared well in other upper-income categories too. Among non-Southern white voters—that is, voters living in states a Democrat must carry or have a shot at carrying to win an election—Obama claimed a majority of those making $80,000 or more. And this group makes up over 30 percent of the electorate outside the South.

Obama needed this strong showing at opposite ends of the income spectrum because he was far weaker in the middle. The two previous Democratic victors, Carter and Bill Clinton, won moderate-income voters—Carter in 1976 by 5.7 points and Clinton in 1992 and 1996 by an average of 6.5 points. Obama merely split these voters with John McCain.

If the president's top priority were foreign affairs, the sharp class dichotomy in his coalition might not be so significant. But his agenda has clear class implications: universal health care aimed at helping the uninsured; stimulus spending heavily oriented toward the unemployed; and a financial bailout that aided Wall Street while enraging lower-income

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voters. And so, while the rich-poor alliance was enough to get Obama to the White House, there is reason to wonder how long—or how well—a coalition divided so sharply along economic lines can survive the process of governing.

You can see the income-based split over health care most clearly in poll numbers. In a recent Gallup poll, those making less than $30,000 urged their congressmen to vote for health care reform by 13 points; those making $75,000 or more took the opposite position by 16 points. But you can also see it in the behavior of Democratic politicians representing wealthy states. Reacting to a suggestion that rich areas of the country are spending too much on Medicare under the current system, Senator John Kerry said, "States like Massachusetts are concentrated centers of medical innovation where cutting-edge treatments are tested and some of the nation's finest doctors are trained. This work might cost a little more, but it benefits the entire country." For her part, Senator Dianne Feinstein of California cut right to the chase: If health care reform means California is going to take it on the chin, she said, "I can't vote for it."

Then there was the financial bailout. The emergence of the rich wing of the Democratic coalition has added a new faction to the party's already-long roster of special interest groups. During the 2008 election cycle, individuals and PACs associated with the securities and investment industry gave $88.6 million to Democrats and $67.5 million to the party of big business. The single biggest recipient of these donations was the president, whose campaign raked in $14.8 million. The influence of this faction seemed discernible in Obama's handling of the Wall Street crisis. Even though the administration initially signaled that it was prepared to take a tough stance—by significantly consolidating the maze of government bodies that regulate the financial sector—when push came to shove, its determination quickly dissolved. And, in July, the House Financial Services committee put off tackling a rather modest reform proposed by the administration: the creation of a consumer financial-protection agency. The measure (which the committee is expected to take up again next month) faced overwhelming industry opposition.

ANTHONY RUSSO

It isn't just economic issues and health care that have class implications. The environment, for example, could plausibly split wealthy Democrats from poor ones. Although the version of cap-and-trade passed by the House goes out of its way to soften the impact on low-income Americans—providing subsidies to the poor to offset increases in the price of carbon—the environment is still widely seen as a priority of the upscale, coastal wing of the Democratic Party. And if, as seems possible, cap-and-trade comes to dominate Obama's agenda in the coming months, poor voters could begin to wonder why the wealthier part of the coalition is garnering all the attention at the expense of other issues—for instance card-check, long a top priority for organized labor.

The point is not that class divisions on any of these issues will single-handedly undo the opportunity to pass a given piece of legislation. It is also quite possible that the combined weight of these rich-poor splits won't end up doing the administration much overall harm. And, even if Obama's coalition ends up wracked by class-based antagonism, Democrats may be able to put off a day of reckoning because of Republican disarray.

Still, it's hard to dismiss the possibility that this intraparty schism based on income might create headaches for Obama. The Democrats have a substantial majority on Capitol Hill, but, with few Republicans willing to break ranks, any Democratic faction has the ability to wield veto power more or less whenever it wants. Obviously, these factions break down along many different lines—but class is certainly one of them.

Moreover, the Democrats' class problem goes beyond the Obama presidency. Looking down the road, the party needs to think about whether a long-term coalition so disproportionately reliant on the far reaches of the income spectrum is sustainable. And if it isn't? That leaves only one thing for Democrats to do: redouble their efforts to once again become the party of the middle class.

Thomas B. Edsall

Going Dutch

Life after the public option.

"You can't really have reform without a public option," former governor Howard Dean, a prominent public-option advocate, said recently. "If you really want to fix the health care system, you've got to give the public the choice of having such an option." Promising as this sounds, it seems increasingly likely that the public option will be a liberal dream deferred. Republicans and conservative Democrats, panicked that the government plan will squash competition and the medical industry as we know it, are slowly killing the idea. Even President Obama, who has endorsed the idea unambiguously, has indicated a willingness to compromise on the issue.

Liberals, understandably, are in agony. But they can take at least some comfort in looking overseas—where one tiny country has managed to build a popular and successful universal health care program based entirely on private insurance. That country is the Netherlands, which several years ago overhauled its health care system and achieved most of the goals the liberal reform movement holds dear: near-universal coverage, affordable insurance, and quality health care.

Under the new system, the Dutch government has required that everybody gets insurance; in return, it makes sure insurance is available to everybody, regardless of pre-existing medical conditions or income. Although the government finances long-term care through a public program, it has turned over the job of providing basic medical coverage exclusively to private insurers, including some for-profit companies. Surveys show that the Dutch are happier with their health care than are Americans—or the people of any other developed country, for that matter. There are even signs, albeit faint ones, that the insurers are achieving what's become the Holy Grail of health reform: using their leverage to improve the quality of care that doctors and hospitals provide—by improving the coordination of treatments for the chronically ill or steering patients to providers that get the best outcomes.

Still, there's a catch. A big catch. Private insurance in the Netherlands works because it operates more or less like a public utility. The Dutch government regulates industry practices tightly—more tightly than the reforms now moving through Congress propose to do in the United States. The public insurance option was supposed to make up for that deficiency, at least in part, by setting a standard for service and affordability that the private industry would have to

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meet—and by offering a fail-safe option in case the private plans simply couldn't keep up. If Congress ends up gutting the public plan, in part or in whole, then it needs to work even harder on making private insurance work. And it's an open question whether that will happen.

What makes private insurance work in the Netherlands? It starts with tradition. The Netherlands first extended insurance coverage to everybody during Germany's occupation of World War II. (It is, the Dutch like to say, the one good thing to come of that experience.) But, by the end of the century, frustration had set in. At the time, government provided insurance directly to people with incomes below a certain threshold; everybody above bought coverage on their own. The left found the system inequitable, since people with private coverage sometimes had better access to care; the right found it inefficient, since they thought public insurance interfered with the natural forces of competition. Eventually, they brokered a deal: Create a seamless system to cover everybody, regardless of income or medical condition, but do it all through private carriers.

The new system came on line in 2006 and, so far, the results are encouraging. Everybody picks an insurance carrier once a year, more or less the same way employees of large companies routinely do here in the United States, during annual open enrollment periods. By law, the coverage is generous, no matter which carrier somebody chooses. Plans cover all medically necessary services—as defined by the government, in consultation with independent experts and medical societies—and they pay for all but a tiny fraction of the bills. The government provides income-based subsidies, and roughly two-thirds of the population gets some assistance. In surveys of major countries by the Commonwealth Fund (which financed my own travel to the Netherlands), the Dutch were least likely to report forgoing care because they couldn't afford it.

But the real secret to success is what happens behind the scenes, in the way government watches and regulates the insurers. The big worry with private insurance is always that carriers, eager to make a profit, will try to avoid paying the large medical bills that people with serious health problems inevitably generate. And the main way insurers do that is by avoiding such people altogether—a practice known as "cherry-picking"—which can ultimately destabilize the entire insurance system.

Dutch health care is so good, they even built a museum for it.

AP PHOTO/FRED ERNST

The Dutch government prohibits cherry-picking. Insurers cannot turn away applicants, or charge them more, because of pre-existing medical conditions or risk of illness. For example, they can't demand that you pay higher premiums just because you happen to work in a physically hazardous job. And, because clever insurers can find ways around such rules—by, for example, marketing largely to young people—the Dutch government takes some crucial additional steps. It makes sure the minimum-benefits package pays for ongoing chronic-disease treatments, as well as for medically intensive services for the seriously ill. It has also been collecting and publishing easy-to-understand data about insurers and providers—not just prices, but consumer reactions and quality indicators as well. The hope is that people will use the data to guide their coverage decisions from one year to the next.

Perhaps more important, the Dutch have what some would consider the world's most sophisticated scheme for "risk equalization." Because even the best regulations may not stop people in relatively good health from congregating in certain plans—and because such separation can wreak havoc with the whole insurance system—the government audits each plan's enrollment every year. Insurers with really healthy beneficiaries—say, a lot of young single people—pay a fee. Insurers with really unhealthy beneficiaries—plans with lots of diabetics or retirees—get a subsidy. In effect, the program takes away the financial reward for shunning unhealthy patients.

That, of course, is all well and good for the enlightened Dutch. But how would you replicate such a system in the United States? To begin with, mandating transparency could help a lot. One way insurers here take advantage of consumers is through confusion. They don't always make clear what's covered, they don't always provide basic

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information in ways that allow consumers to easily comparison shop, and they aren't currently required to submit data about their activities to any single authority. Fortunately, that's one set of problems reform seems likely to fix. A provision first introduced by Representative Rosa DeLauro and Allyson Schwartz, along with Senator Jay Rockefeller, would mandate a "coverage label" modeled on the nutrition label that all food products must include. The label would let consumers see, in plain terms, what protection different policies covered. In addition, the plans under consideration in Congress would establish minimum-benefit standards, initially for individuals and small businesses. (They could later extend to all plans.) Consumers who bought plans governed by the standards wouldn't have to wonder whether a plan covers preventative services or chronic care, because that coverage would be part of the law—just like in the Netherlands.

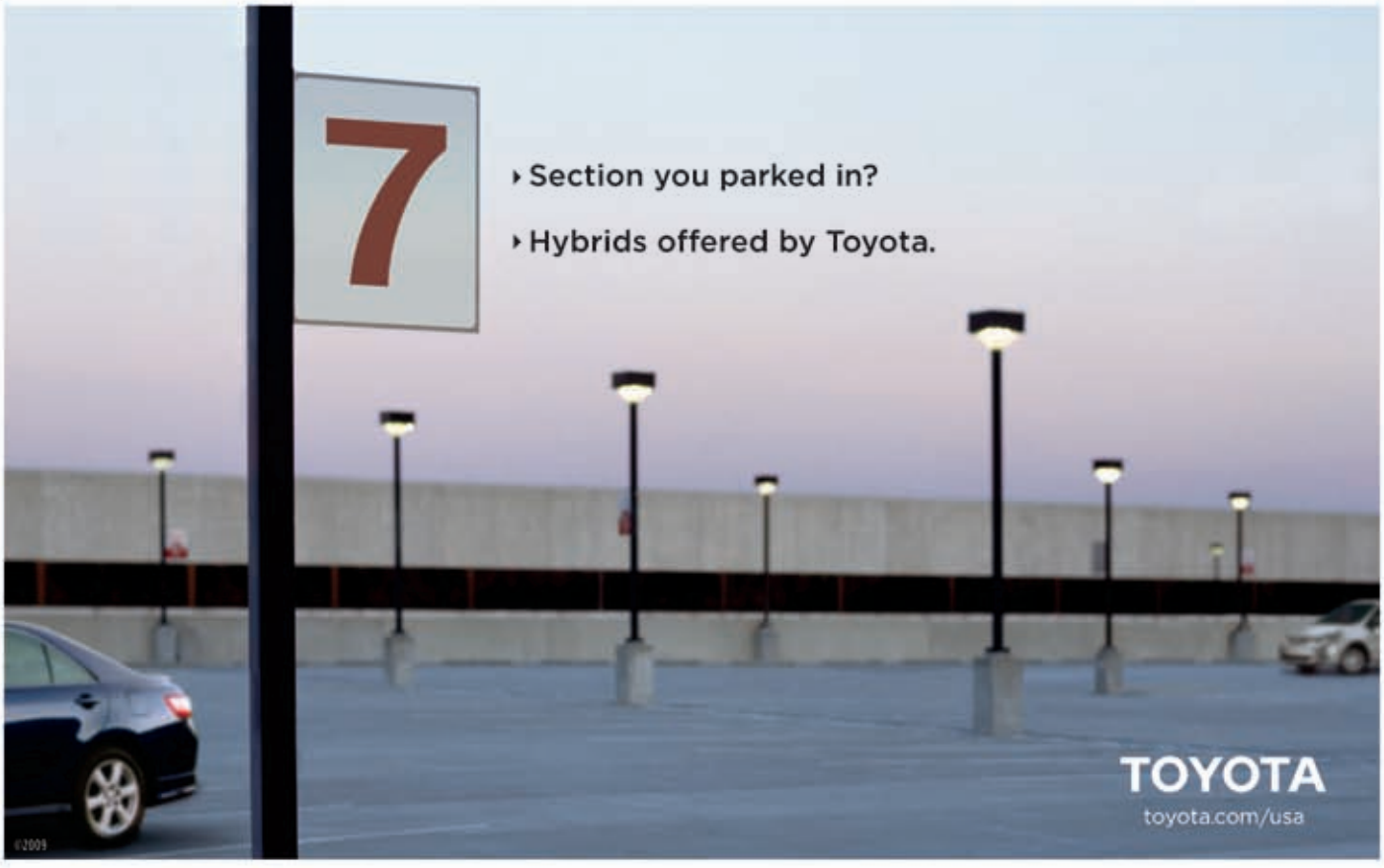
But, as in the Netherlands, the more important work is what consumers won't see directly: the way the government will regulate insurers. And it's not so clear that the reforms under consideration will do everything they must. A key goal, here as there, is preventing insurers from cherry-picking. In theory, all of the plans would prohibit insurers from excluding or charging higher rates to people in poor health. But the bill now before the Senate Finance Committee, for example, would allow insurers to vary rates according to age—which can be a proxy for health—by a factor of five. (Adequate subsidies can help mitigate this, but the Finance bill doesn't have those, either.) What's more, because all the plans before Congress allow companies to vary offerings considerably, insurance companies could tilt their coverage in ways that attract healthier beneficiaries. An aggressive risk-equalization scheme, like the one in the Netherlands, could help thwart such efforts—but the reform bills don't specify how aggressive those schemes will be.

One additional issue, not to be overlooked, is the question of price. Dutch consumers don't have to worry about paying a lot of money for their health care, even if they are sick, in part because the insurance has very little cost-sharing—and in part because the government continues to play a strong role in setting prices, although it's been gradually relaxing them. But there's nothing in the current bills approaching the type of price controls that the Netherlands has. In the Senate Finance bill, some middle-class people could spend almost one-third of their incomes—$20,000—on medical care. The House bill has better protection, but there may not be political support for it

Unless, of course, progressives can create political pressure for such regulations. Most of the left is focused on preserving the public option, in some form; and, overall, that does still seem like a highly effective way to make private insurance work. But, if they can't succeed, improving the other elements of reform becomes all the more important. The U.S. health care system will never look entirely like the one in the Netherlands: the demographic, cultural, and political differences are simply too vast. But, with sufficiently strong regulation, it can achieve some of the same virtues. And that would be an accomplishment of which the left could still feel proud.

Jonathan Cohn

Explore Jonathan Cohn's blog for more on the politics of health care. ***THE TREATMENT*** *at www.tnr.com*



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Job One

The only way Obama can pull his presidency back from the brink.

JOHN B. JUDIS

Barack Obama looks like he will succeed where three Democratic presidents, Harry Truman, Jimmy Carter, and Bill Clinton, so famously failed—by passing health care reform. That is an achievement for which posterity will likely reward him. But it may not help him and his party avoid setbacks at the polls.

Consider the danger signs slowly accumulating. The off-year gubernatorial elections in New Jersey and Virginia are usually a harbinger of political success or failure for the party in power. When Republicans George Allen and Christine Todd Whitman won those races in November 1993, it was a clear indication of trouble ahead for the Democrats nationally. Currently, Republicans are leading in the polls in both states—states that Obama won in 2008.

Then there are Obama's approval ratings and what they portend for the 2010 midterms. In January, when he gave his inaugural address, Obama enjoyed a 69 percent approval rating, with just 13 percent disapproving. Since late August, his approval numbers have been hovering around 50 percent, and his disapproval numbers have been mostly in the low forties. Clinton's ratings suffered a similar decline in his first year, and it spelled disaster for the 1994 congressional elections. The same thing appears to be happening again: If current polls hold up, Democrats could fail to keep Senate seats in Nevada, Colorado, Illinois, and Connecticut next year. Political analyst Charlie Cook has recently estimated that the Democrats could lose more than 20 House seats.

Will the coming midterm election look like the debacle that bulldozed Bill Clinton and the Democrats in 1994?

Are these signs of voter discontent the result of tactical errors by Obama? Would the numbers look different if he had given his impassioned defense of national health care in February, or if he and Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner had been tougher on the banks earlier this year? Perhaps these tactics would have led to a temporary bounce in Obama's popularity, but they would not have changed its overall trajectory. That's because Obama's fortunes are being driven mainly by one thing: not health care, but the economy.

To understand the lockstep relationship between Obama's popularity and the state of the economy, it helps to look at two previous presidents who, like Obama, confronted a failing economy: Franklin Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan.

When Roosevelt took office in 1933, unemployment was almost 25 percent, but, during his first term, it fell steadily—to less than 14 percent in November 1936. The economy, in other words, seemed to be healing. Gallup wasn't measuring presidential approval then, but FDR's rising popularity was evident in election results: Democrats picked up congressional seats in 1934 and 1936, despite already enjoying huge majorities; and, in 1936, Roosevelt won in a landslide, carrying the Electoral College by the largest margin ever.

The arc of Reagan's popularity illustrates the same phenomenon. In July 1981, when unemployment stood at 7.2 percent—what it had been at the end of Carter's presidency—only 28 percent of Gallup's respondents disapproved of Reagan. But, by January 1983, after unemployment had risen to 10.8 percent the previous month, Reagan's disapproval rating was a whopping 54 percent. In November 1982, even a crippled Democratic Party had been able to win seats in the House and Senate. During the same time, Reagan benefited politically from surviving an assassination attempt, got Congress to approve his signature tax and budget programs, and certainly didn't make egregious political errors. What mattered, finally, was the economy. And, as the economy turned around, so did the GOP's political prospects. By November 1984, unemployment had dropped back to 7.2 percent, and only 30 percent of respondents disapproved of Reagan. In that month's election, he claimed a landslide victory over Walter Mondale. (To see how closely Reagan's disapproval ratings tracked unemployment, see Figure 1.)

For both Roosevelt and Reagan, what mattered was not the actual state of the economy, but whether things were getting better or worse. The unemployment rate was still incredibly high when FDR won reelection in 1936, and Reagan didn't actually lower unemployment between the time he took office and the time he was reelected—he only managed to get it back to where it had been at the start of his term. But, in both 1936 and 1984, the *trajectory* of unemployment was downward, and that was the key.

Moreover, history suggests that it is not enough for the economy to be headed in the right direction; it has to be headed in the right direction in tangible ways that voters can see. Economists pronounced the recession of the early 1990s

AFP PHOTO/JEWEL SAMAD

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over in March 1991. But, when unemployment continued to rise through 1991 and most of 1992 and real wages stagnated, the public perceived the economy to still be declining—and it punished George H.W. Bush accordingly.

Clinton, who was harmed by wage stagnation during his first two years, benefited dramatically in his second term from the public's perception of economic improvement. In 1998, Clinton was involved in the first impeachment scandal since Watergate, and it was widely expected that his party would lose seats in the midterm elections. But economic good news trumped Monica Lewinsky. As the unemployment rate went down during this period, Clinton's popularity increased. And Democrats ended up winning House seats in 1998 and House and Senate seats in 2000. (Figure 2 shows the close correlation between Clinton's disapproval numbers and the unemployment rate.)

To be sure, there can be mitigating factors that counter the effect a declining economy has on a president's popularity. In the first nine months of George W. Bush's administration, as the unemployment rate rose from 4.2 percent to 5 percent, his disapproval numbers rose from 25 percent to 39 percent. That was to be expected. But unemployment continued to rise, climbing to 5.9 percent in April 2002, while Bush's disapproval rating *fell* to 19 percent. The reason, of course, was that public approval of Bush's response to September 11 overshadowed doubts about his handling of the economy.

Similar factors could certainly make the state of the economy less important in shaping Obama's popularity—dramatic success or failure in Afghanistan, for instance, or a new terrorist attack—but, for now, these factors are not in play. And that means Obama's fortunes, like those of so many of his predecessors, are tethered to the economy.

At the peak of Obama's popularity in January, when 69 percent approved and only 13 percent disapproved of his presidency, the unemployment rate was 7.6 percent. In September, after unemployment had climbed to 9.7 percent, 52 percent approved and 41 percent disapproved. Indeed, except during the spring, there has been a close correlation between unemployment and Obama's disapproval ratings throughout the last nine months (see Figure 3).

These numbers are ominous. Obama's disapproval ratings exceed those of every president since Eisenhower at this early stage—except for Clinton, who had similar disapproval ratings nine months into his first term. And they can't be explained as the inevitable result of the administration's honeymoon period coming to an end: Eisenhower, Kennedy, and George H.W. Bush all saw their popularity *rise* during the same period Obama's has fallen.

So what can Obama do? It's easy to say what would really help: rapid job growth, the revival of the housing market, transit systems that aren't breaking down, the reinstitution of after-school programs, crowded shopping malls and auto showrooms—the kind of things that go with a robust economic recovery. But the U.S. economy isn't going to morph overnight from its current woeful condition to a state of buoyant full employment. In a September 14 speech, Janet Yellen, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, warned of a "tepid" recovery that is "vulnerable to shocks" and an "unemployment rate [that] will remain elevated for a few more years."

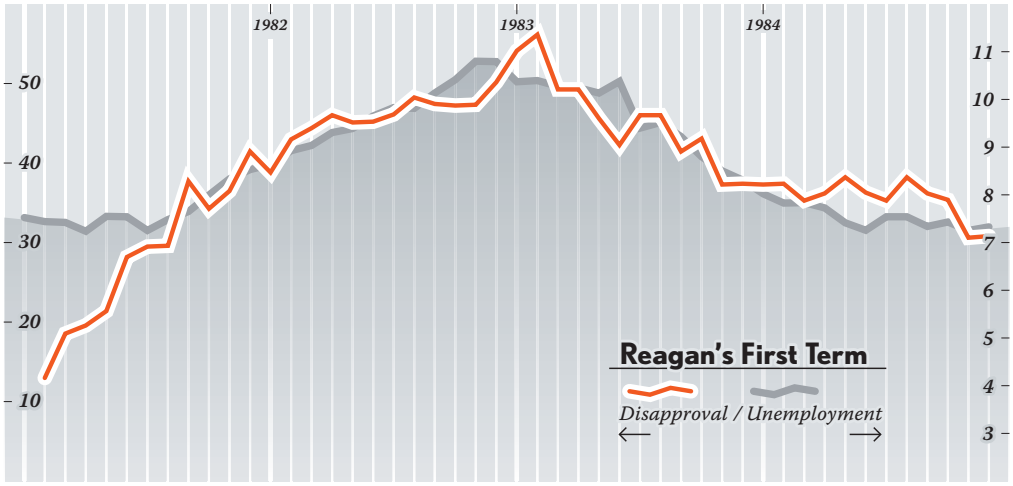
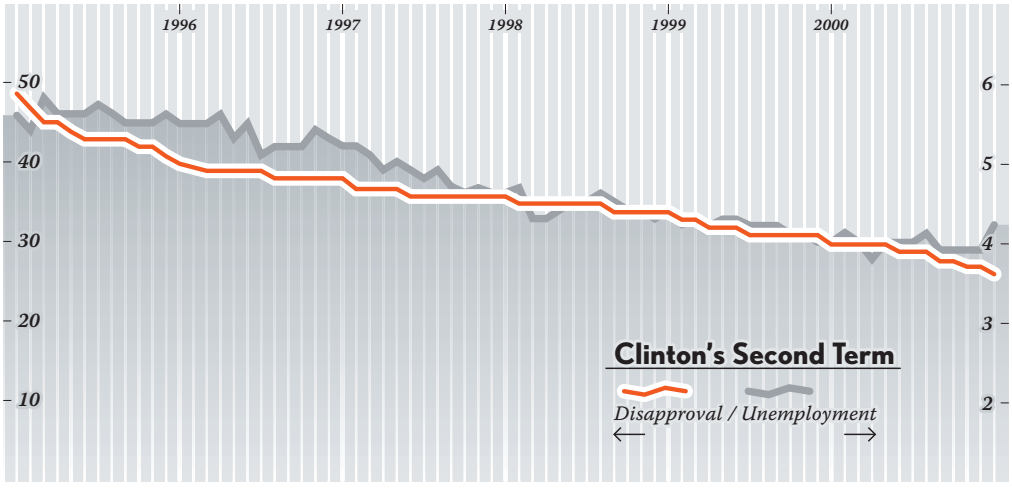


Figure 1

Figure 2



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What Obama and the Democrats have to hope for, then, is not a full recovery, but sufficient improvement in jobs, wages, and public services to convince voters that the economy is on the mend. That's what helped Roosevelt and Reagan keep their majorities—and, in Roosevelt's case, what lay the basis for nearly four decades of Democratic hegemony. With the Republicans in disarray and demographic trends favoring the Democrats, an uptick in the economy for which voters credit Obama could lay the basis for a new Democratic majority. But, to accomplish this, Obama must promote programs that visibly and immediately provide economic relief.

In that respect, even a successful resolution to the current health care debate is unlikely to do Obama much good. Yes, it will ward off the stigma of incompetence and ineffective leadership that haunted Carter and Clinton during their first two years, but it isn't likely to overcome the drag on Obama's popularity of continuing joblessness.

As presently designed, the health care bill won't take effect until 2013—after the 2012 election. Even then, its effects may not be felt by many voters who already have insurance. Over the years, I've heard Democrats hope and Republicans fear that a health care bill will do for Democratic electoral prospects what the introduction of Social Security in 1935 did for Roosevelt. But this assertion is based on a misunderstanding of the original Social Security Act. That bill included old-age insurance, unemployment compensation, and public assistance for poor seniors and children. The introduction of unemployment compensation probably did help FDR, since the concrete economic benefits could be felt immediately. But old-age insurance—what we now call Social Security—remained controversial and open to attack from anti-tax Republicans for years to come. Taxes for old-age insurance began in 1937 (and were later seen as contributing to the downturn that year), but benefits, which were very small, were not slated to be paid until 1942. Many workers, including farm laborers, domestic employees, professionals, and the self-employed, were not even eligible for old-age pensions.

It wasn't until 1950, when Congress expanded the scope of the program to include most employees and the self-employed, and when the benefits were increased to exceed those of welfare, that Social Security became a boon to the Democratic Party. And that was 15 years after it was created. Obama's health care bill could suffer a similar political fate—both because the initial benefits will take years to come into play and because, even when they do, the system will probably remain a work in progress for a very long time. Eventually, health care reform could undergird a liberal majority. But, in the short term, it will not necessarily keep Obama and congressional Democrats in office.

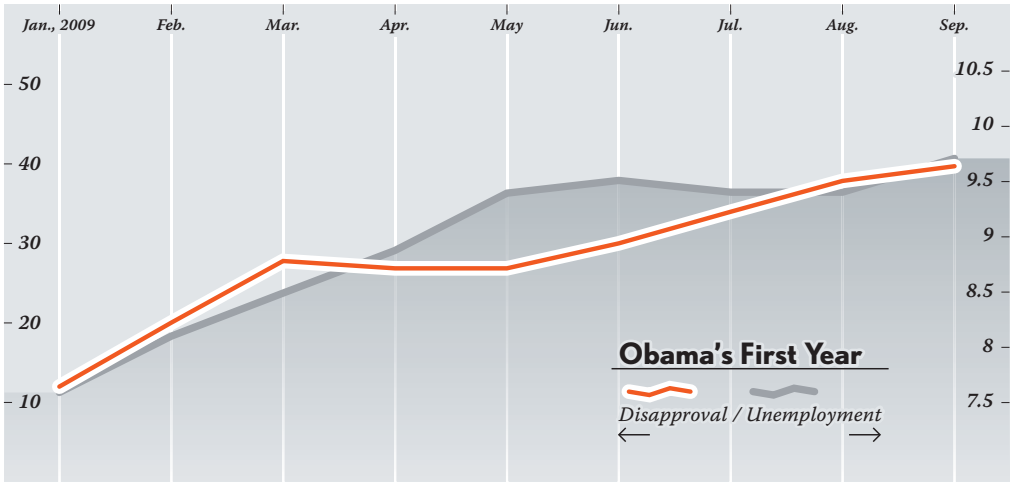

Figure 3

It took years for Social Security to become a boon to Democrats. The same could be true of health care.

What dramatized the New Deal's contribution to the economy—ensuring that Roosevelt was given credit for the rise in employment—was the advent of colorful new agencies like the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Rural Electrification Administration, the Works Progress Administration, and the Public Works Administration. If Obama wants to follow Roosevelt's precedent, he'll introduce programs that provide jobs *and* capture the public's imagination. In a late August CNN poll showing that the public narrowly disapproved of Obama's "handling of the economy," respondents still deemed "cash for clunkers"—a perfect example of a visible and imaginative stimulus program—a success rather than a failure by 55 percent to 40 percent.

Moreover, to avoid what marred Roosevelt's second term—the precipitous double-dip in the depression that occurred in 1937–1938—Obama should turn a deaf ear to those who are calling for fiscal responsibility. He should keep pouring money into jobs and into the pockets of people who will spend until the unemployment rate begins going down and wages begin going up. That may mean a second stimulus (despite the current hostility toward spending in Congress) would be worth pushing. He might also be wise to follow Reagan's example and get tough with foreign competitors who are using import barriers, export subsidies, and currency manipulation to inflict large trade deficits on the United States. And, whatever he does to try to mend the economy, Obama should never stop loudly trumpeting his efforts—so that he is able to reap the credit when improvements occur.

None of this is to say that Obama shouldn't try to pass a major health care overhaul. He is correct that Democrats may not have another chance to do so for decades—and, as the experience of Social Security shows, an imperfect program can be improved over time. There is good reason to applaud the president's statement to Congress that "we did not come here just to clean up crises, we came here to build a future." But, if Obama doesn't clean up the crisis and get the economy moving again, his administration may not be around to enjoy the future he is building. ◆

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Aquacalypse Now

The end of fish.

DANIEL PAULY

Our oceans have been the victims of a giant Ponzi scheme, waged with Bernie Madoff–like callousness by the world's fisheries. Beginning in the 1950s, as their operations became increasingly industrialized—with onboard refrigeration, acoustic fish-finders, and, later, GPS—they first depleted stocks of cod, hake, flounder, sole, and halibut in the Northern Hemisphere. As those stocks disappeared, the fleets moved southward, to the coasts of developing nations and, ultimately, all the way to the shores of Antarctica, searching for icefishes and rockcods, and, more recently, for small, shrimplike krill. As the bounty of coastal waters dropped, fisheries moved further offshore, to deeper waters. And, finally, as the larger fish began to disappear, boats began to catch fish that were smaller and uglier—fish never before considered fit for human consumption. Many were renamed so that they could be marketed: The suspicious slimehead became the delicious orange roughy, while the worrisome Patagonian toothfish became the wholesome Chilean seabass. Others, like the homely hoki, were cut up so they could be sold sight-unseen as fish sticks and filets in fast-food restaurants and the frozen-food aisle.

The scheme was carried out by nothing less than a fishing-industrial complex—an alliance of corporate fishing fleets, lobbyists, parliamentary representatives, and fisheries economists. By hiding behind the romantic image of the small-scale, independent fisherman, they secured political influence and government subsidies far in excess of what would be expected, given their minuscule contribution to the GDP of advanced economies—in the United States, even less than that of the hair salon industry. In Japan, for example, huge, vertically integrated conglomerates, such as Taiyo or the better-known Mitsubishi, lobby their friends in the Japanese Fisheries Agency and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to help them gain access to the few remaining plentiful stocks of tuna, like those in the waters surrounding South Pacific countries. Beginning in the early 1980s, the United States, which had not traditionally been much of a fishing country, began heavily subsidizing U.S. fleets, producing its own fishing-industrial complex, dominated by large processors and retail chains. Today, governments provide nearly $30 billion in subsidies each year—about one-third of the value of the global catch—that keep fisheries going, even when they have overexploited their resource base. As a result, there are between two and four times as many boats as the annual catch requires, and yet, the funds to "build capacity" keep coming.

The jig, however, is nearly up. In 1950, the newly constituted Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations estimated that, globally, we were catching about 20 million metric tons of fish (cod, mackerel, tuna, etc.) and invertebrates (lobster, squid, clams, etc.). That catch peaked at 90 million tons per year in the late 1980s, and it has been declining ever since. Much like Madoff's infamous operation, which required a constant influx of new investments to generate "revenue" for past investors, the global fishing-industrial complex has required a constant influx of new stocks to continue operation. Instead of restricting its catches so that fish can reproduce and maintain their populations, the industry has simply fished until a stock is depleted and then moved on to new or deeper waters, and to smaller and stranger fish. And, just as a Ponzi scheme will collapse once the pool of potential investors has been drained, so too will the fishing industry collapse as the oceans are drained of life.

Unfortunately, it is not just the future of the fishing industry that is at stake, but also the continued health of the world's largest ecosystem. While the climate crisis gathers front-page attention on a regular basis, people—even those who profess great environmental consciousness—continue to eat fish as if it were a sustainable practice. But eating a tuna roll at a sushi restaurant should be considered no more environmentally benign than driving a Hummer or harpooning a manatee. In the past 50 years, we have reduced the populations of large commercial fish, such as bluefin tuna, cod, and other favorites, by a staggering 90 percent. One study, published in the prestigious journal *Science*, forecast that, by 2048, *all* commercial fish stocks will have "collapsed," meaning that they will be generating 10 percent or less of their peak catches. Whether or not that particular year, or even decade, is correct, one thing is clear: Fish are in dire peril, and, if they are, then so are we.

The extent of the fisheries' Ponzi scheme eluded government scientists for many years. They had long studied the health of fish populations, of course, but typically, laboratories would focus only on the species in their nation's waters. And those studying a particular species in one country would communicate only with those studying that same species in another. Thus, they failed to notice an important pattern: Popular species were sequentially replacing each other in the catches that fisheries were reporting, and, when a species faded, scientific attention shifted to the replacement species. At any given moment, scientists might acknowledge that one-half or two-thirds of fisheries were being overfished, but, when the stock of a particular fish was used up, it was simply removed from the denominator of the fraction. For example, the Hudson River sturgeon wasn't counted as an overfished stock once it disappeared from New York waters; it simply became an anecdote in the historical record. The baselines just kept shifting, allowing us to continue blithely damaging marine ecosystems.

It was not until the 1990s that a series of high-profile scientific papers demonstrated that we needed to study, and mitigate, fish depletions at the global level. They showed that phenomena previously observed at local levels—for example, the disappearance of large species from fisheries' catches and their replacement by smaller species—were also occurring globally. It was a realization akin to understanding that the financial meltdown was due not to the failure of a single bank, but, rather, to the failure of the entire banking system—and it drew a lot of controversy.

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The notion that fish are globally imperiled has been challenged in many ways—perhaps most notably by fisheries biologists, who have questioned the facts, the tone, and even the integrity of those making such allegations. Fisheries biologists are different than marine ecologists like myself. Marine ecologists are concerned mainly with threats to the diversity of the ecosystems that they study, and so, they frequently work in concert with environmental NGOs and are often funded by philanthropic foundations. By contrast, fisheries biologists traditionally work for government agencies, like the National Marine Fisheries Service at the Commerce Department, or as consultants to the fishing industry, and their chief goal is to protect fisheries and the fishermen they employ. I myself was trained as a fisheries biologist in Germany, and, while they would dispute this, the agencies for which many of my former classmates work clearly have been captured by the industry they are supposed to regulate. Thus, there are fisheries scientists who, for example, write that cod have "recovered" or even "doubled" their numbers when, in fact, they have increased merely from 1 percent to 2 percent of their original abundance in the 1950s.

Yet, despite their different interests and priorities—and despite their disagreements on the "end of fish"—marine ecologists and fisheries scientists both want there to be more fish in the oceans. Partly, this is because both are scientists, who are expected to concede when confronted with strong evidence. And, in the case of fisheries, as with global warming, the evidence is overwhelming: Stocks are declining in most parts of the world. And, ultimately, the important rift is not between these two groups of scientists, but between the public, which owns the sea's resources, and the fishing-industrial complex, which needs fresh capital for its Ponzi scheme. The difficulty lies in forcing the fishing-industrial complex to catch fewer fish so that populations can rebuild.

It is essential that we do so as quickly as possible because the consequences of an end to fish are frightful. To some Western nations, an end to fish might simply seem like a culinary catastrophe, but for 400 million people in developing nations, particularly in poor African and South Asian countries, fish are the main source of animal protein. What's more, fisheries are a major source of livelihood for hundreds of million of people. A recent World Bank report found that the income of the world's 30 million small-scale fisheries is shrinking. The decrease in catch has also dealt a blow to a prime source of foreign-exchange earnings, on which impoverished countries, ranging from Senegal in West Africa to the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific, rely to support their imports of staples such as rice.

And, of course, the end of fish would disrupt marine ecosystems to an extent that we are only now beginning to appreciate. Thus, the removal of small fish in the Mediterranean to fatten bluefin tuna in pens is causing the "common" dolphin to become exceedingly rare in some areas, with local extinction probable. Other marine mammals and seabirds are similarly affected in various parts of the world. Moreover, the removal of top predators from marine ecosystems has effects that cascade down, leading to the increase of jellyfish and other gelatinous zooplankton and to the gradual erosion of the food web within which fish populations are embedded. This is what happened off the coast of southwestern Africa, where an upwelling ecosystem similar to that off California, previously dominated by fish such as hake and sardines, has become overrun by millions of tons of jellyfish.

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Jellyfish population outbursts are also becoming more frequent in the northern Gulf of Mexico, where the fertilizer-laden runoff from the Mississippi River fuels uncontrolled algae blooms. The dead algae then fall to a sea bottom from which shrimp trawling has raked all animals capable of feeding on them, and so they rot, causing Massachusetts-sized "dead zones." Similar phenomena—which only jellyfish seem to enjoy—are occurring throughout the world, from the Baltic Sea to the Chesapeake Bay, and from the Black Sea in southeastern Europe to the Bohai Sea in northeastern China. Our oceans, having nourished us since the beginning of the human species some 150,000 years ago, are now turning against us, becoming angry opponents.

That dynamic will only grow more antagonistic as the oceans become warmer and more acidic because of climate change. Fish are expected to suffer mightily from global warming, making it essential that we preserve as great a number of fish and of fish species as possible, so that those which are able to adapt are around to evolve and propagate the next incarnations of marine life. In fact, new evidence tentatively suggests that large quantities of fish biomass could actually help attenuate ocean acidification. In other words, fish could help save us from the worst consequences of our own folly—yet we are killing them off. The jellyfish-ridden waters we're seeing now may be only the first scene in a watery horror show.

To halt this slide toward a marine dystopia, government intervention is required. Regulatory agencies must impose quotas on the amount of fish caught in any given year, and the way they structure such quotas is very important. For example, simply permitting all fisheries to catch a given aggregate number of fish annually results in a wasteful build-up of fleets and vessels as fisheries race to grab as large a share of the quota as possible before their competitors do. Such a system may protect the fish, but it is economically disastrous: The entire annual quota is usually landed in a short period, leading to temporary oversupply, which, in turn, leads to low prices. The alternative is to limit the number of fishermen, with those retaining "access privileges" being able to catch their assigned fraction of the overall quota whenever they want, without competing against other fishermen. Such individual quotas lead to less overall fishing effort and, hence, bigger profit in the fishery.

Unfortunately, most fisheries economists, fixated solely on corporate short-term profits, argue that, for such a system to work, access privileges must *(a)* be handed out for free, *(b)* be held in perpetuity, and *(c)* be transferrable (i.e., sellable and buyable like any other commodity). They call this construct "fishing rights" or "individual transferable quotas." However, there is no reason why a government should not auction off quotas with access privileges. The highest bidder would secure the right to a certain percentage of the quota, with society as a whole benefiting from providing private access to a public resource. This would be similar to ranchers paying—as they do—for the privilege to graze their cattle on federal lands. Grazing "rights" on the other hand, would simply give ownership of public land to ranchers, which is something few would consider.

Some Pollyannas believe that aquaculture, or fish farming, can ensure the health of stocks without government action—a notion supposedly buttressed by FAO statistics showing such rapid growth in aquaculture that more than 40 percent of all "seafood" consumed now comes from farms. The problem with this argument is that China reports about 68 percent of the world's aquaculture

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production, and the FAO, which has been burned by inflated Chinese statistics before, expresses doubt about its stated production and growth rates. Outside of China—where most farmed fish are freshwater vegetarians, such as carp—aquaculture produces predominately carnivorous marine fish, like salmon, which are fed not only vegetal ingredients, but also fishmeal and fish oil, which are obtained by grinding up herring, mackerel, and sardines caught by "reduction fisheries." Carnivore farming, which requires three to four pounds of smaller fish to produce one pound of a larger one, thus robs Peter to pay Paul. Aquaculture in the West produces a luxury product in global terms. To expect aquaculture to ensure that fish remain available—or, at least, to expect carnivore farming to solve the problem posed by diminishing catches from fisheries—would be akin to expecting that Enzo Ferrari's cars can solve gridlock in Los Angeles.

Others believe that fish populations can be rebuilt through consumer awareness campaigns that encourage buyers to make prudent choices. One such approach is to label seafood from fisheries deemed sustainable. In Europe, for example, consumers can look for the logo of the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), a nonprofit started by the World Wildlife Fund and Unilever, which has a large fish-trading division. At first, the MSC certified only small-scale fisheries, but lately, it has given its seal of approval to large, controversial companies. Indeed, it has begun to measure its success by the percentage of the world catch that it certifies. Encouraged by a Walton Foundation grant and Wal-Mart's goal of selling only certified fish, the MSC is actually considering certifying reduction fisheries, with the consequence that Wal-Mart, for example, will be able to sell farmed salmon shining with the ersatz glow of sustainability. (Given the devastating pollution, diseases, and parasite infestations that have plagued salmon farms in Chile, Canada, and other countries, this "Wal-Mart strategy" will, in the long term, make the MSC complicit to a giant scam.)

The other market-based initiative, prevalent in the United States, distributes wallet-size cards designed to steer consumers toward fish that the group issuing the cards deems to have been caught sustainably. Their success is considerable if measured by the millions of cards given away, for example, by the Monterey Bay Aquarium, but assessing the impact on the fisheries is difficult. For one thing, the multitude of such cards leads to contradictions and confusion, as the same fish are assessed differently by different organizations. For example, ahi tuna is rated as "safe," "questionable," and "avoid" on the wallet cards issued by three U.S. nonprofits. A bigger issue, however, is that these cards generate only "horizontal" pressure—that is, a group of restaurant-goers might chide each other for ordering the cod filet or might ask the overworked student who served them where the fish came from, but this pressure does not reach wholesalers, fleet operators, or supermarket chains. "Vertical" pressure exerted by environmental NGOs on such decision-makers is far more effective. But, if that's true, why not directly pressure the government and legislators, since they are the ones who regulate the fisheries?

Our oceans have been the victims of a giant Ponzi scheme.

The truth is that governments are the only entities that can prevent the end of fish. For one thing, once freed from their allegiance to the fishing-industrial complex, they are the ones with the research infrastructure capable of prudently managing fisheries. For another, it is they who provide the billions of dollars in annual subsidies that allow the fisheries to persist despite the lousy economics of the industry. Reducing these subsidies would allow fish populations to rebuild, and nearly all fisheries scientists agree that the billions of dollars in harmful, capacity-enhancing subsidies must be phased out. Finally, only governments can zone the marine environment, identifying certain areas where fishing will be tolerated and others where it will not. In fact, all maritime countries will have to regulate their exclusive economic zones (the 200-mile boundary areas established by the U.N. Law of the Sea Treaty within which a nation has the sole right to fish). The United States has the largest exclusive economic zone in the world, and it has taken important first steps in protecting its resources, notably in the northwest Hawaiian islands. Creating, or re-creating, un-fished areas within which fish populations can regenerate is the only opportunity we have to repair the damage done to them.

There is no need for an end to fish, or to fishing for that matter. But there is an urgent need for governments to free themselves from the fishing-industrial complex and its Ponzi scheme, to stop subsidizing the fishing-industrial complex and awarding it fishing rights, when it should in fact pay for the privilege to fish. If we can do this, then we will have fish forever. ◆

Jellyfish populations are exploding in marine ecosystems severely disrupted by the decline of fish.

MICHAEL DAWSON/REUTERS/LANDOV

Daniel Pauly is a professor at the Fisheries Centre of the University of British Columbia and the principal investigator of its Sea Around Us Project.

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Sean McCabe

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Drunk With Power

The energy villain in your neighborhood.

BRADFORD PLUMER

In 2001, an entrepreneur named Tom Casten traveled down to southern Louisiana, near the small town of Franklin, with a clever idea. For decades, the area had sustained a pair of chemical plants that produced carbon black, a grimy powder used in printer ink and tire rubber. But the owner of one of the plants, Cabot Corporation, was struggling to compete against cheap tire imports from abroad, and desperately seeking ways to cut costs. That's where Casten came in. He pointed out that the gas left over from the carbon-black process was just getting wasted—burned off and flared up into the sky. He proposed building a recycling facility that could capture the gas and use it to generate electricity. Not only would this make the plant slightly cleaner—carbon-black plants are notorious polluters—but there'd be enough juice to run Cabot's operations, and for less than it cost to buy power from the local utility. In all, the company could save up to $1.3 million per year.

The notion that a factory could run on its own waste may seem fantastical. And, as it turned out, Casten's scheme *was* too good to be true. Only the plan didn't fail for technical reasons. Recycling waste energy is perfectly doable—in the nineteenth century, Thomas Edison sold exhaust heat from Manhattan's first power plant to warm neighboring buildings. Instead, the proposal got ensnared in the thicket of rules and incentives that shape the way electricity is produced in the United States—rules that mainly benefit existing power companies, while leaving our energy system dirtier and clunkier than it ought to be.

Casten's original plan was to sell one-third of the recycled power to Cabot's plant, and the rest to an industrial facility just down the road for around $45 per megawatt-hour—cheaper than the $55/MWh that electricity cost in the area, yet still high enough for the project to be profitable. But, in Louisiana, as in most of the United States, state law forbids anyone from stringing up private wires across a public street. Casten couldn't market his power directly—he could only sell it to the local electric utility. And, because the utility, due to state rules, chiefly earned a profit from the power plants it built and ran itself, it refused to offer anything more than rock-bottom prices for Casten's recycled power—prices too stingy for the project to work. After many months of bitter wrangling, Cabot gave up entirely. As a final insult, the utility later won approval from regulators to build a brand new fossil-fuel plant, a pricier way to generate electricity that would also add more carbon to the air.

The Louisiana utility wasn't doing anything evil—it was just responding rationally to the rules laid down—but the end result was perverse. "It's like we're forcing citizens to pay extra to heat the planet," Casten bristles. And similar roadblocks stand in the way of recycling across the country, with jaw-dropping consequences: One study for the EPA found that harnessing industrial waste energy had the potential to meet 19 percent of the country's electricity needs—equal to 95 nuclear plants—while slashing fossil-fuel use in the power sector by one-quarter.

The problem goes well beyond energy recycling. Right now, Congress is crafting legislation to curb U.S. greenhouse gases in order to avert a climate catastrophe. The centerpiece of that bill is a cap-and-trade system that would place an economy-wide limit on carbon-dioxide emissions and let companies trade permits among themselves—in essence, letting the free market decide how best to make cuts. But the electricity sector, which is responsible for roughly 40 percent of the country's emissions, is anything but free or flexible. Instead, it's governed by a bewildering patchwork of regulations that depress innovation, thwart efficiency improvements, and hinder the adoption of cleaner forms of energy. That means our best efforts to solve the climate crisis could fall short, unless we revamp the rules that shape the way we get electricity. If health care reform seems nightmarish, just wait for the fight over the grid.

To grasp why we have the system we do, you have to travel back to the 1920s. At the time, the U.S. electric industry was dominated by just 16 large "power trusts" that controlled 85 percent of the nation's electricity. The trusts were infamous for charging bloated rates and providing uneven service. Consumer protections were unheard of. "Nothing like this gigantic monopoly has ever appeared in the history of the world," fumed Gifford Pinchot, who railed against the oligarchs as governor of Pennsylvania in the 1920s and '30s. "Nothing has been imagined before that remotely approaches it in the thoroughgoing, intimate, unceasing control it may exercise over the daily life of every human being within the web of its wires." And maybe the only thing worse than being abused by the trusts was *not* being abused: Ninety percent of rural Americans had no electricity at all, since utilities scorned them as unprofitable customers. At the height of the Roaring Twenties, millions were still sweating over wood stoves and hand-scrubbing laundry.

That all changed after the crash of 1929. As it turned out, many utility holding companies had been perched atop Enron-style accounting schemes that collapsed with the stock market. The New Dealers swooped in with a new regulatory regime that broke up the trusts and replaced them with local monopolies that were vigorously regulated by the states. Under the new system, electric utilities could only charge rates that allowed them to earn a reasonable return on their power-plant investments; the path to boosting profits was to sell more electricity. This gave them incentive to build large central plants and run wires into every last cranny of the country. Utilities gained a knack for convincing Americans to get plugged in: A typical ad from the 1950s offered magazine readers a checklist of available home appliances, from electric shavers to waffle makers, with the unsubtle tagline, "How High Is Your Standard Of Living?"

This arrangement may have proved effective at supplying affordable, reliable power to every home in America, but it also had downsides. Because they were shielded from competition, most utilities saw little reason to innovate or upgrade their lumbering fossil-fuel plants, since they'd just be forced to pass on any savings to consumers. A *Fortune* article in 1969 savaged utility executives as "generally unimaginative men, grown complacent on private monopoly and regulated profits." After the

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OPEC crisis in the '70s exposed the industry's clumsiness in the face of adversity, Congress tried to promote competition on the generation side in some states. But deregulation was only partial, and most Americans still have little, if any, choice of utility. "When it comes to electricity, we're still living in the era of black rotary phones," says Kurt Yeager of the Galvin Electric Initiative, alluding to AT&T's old monopoly in the telecom sector.

Today, the country's 3,200-plus electric utilities stand as America's largest industry, and the private companies that crank out roughly 75 percent of the nation's power reward their investors with tantalizing returns each year. Yet problems abound. Most power plants are scarcely more energy-efficient than they were in the 1960s. (As it happens, environmental laws have exacerbated the situation: When the Clean Air Act was written, it exempted older plants, spurring utilities to keep their dinosaurs on life-support for decades.) The nation's electric grid—from high-voltage transmission lines to distribution wires—has fallen into disrepair, with blackouts and disruptions costing the economy up to $150 billion each year. And, though electricity prices have stayed low in recent decades, that's not likely to last: The average power plant was built in 1964, and between that and the grid, replacing our aging fleet will, according to the consultants at The Brattle Group, cost some $1.5 trillion in coming decades, making rate hikes inevitable.

What's more, upending this state of affairs is no small task. Due to their size and geographic reach, utilities have plenty of political sway. The power sector spent $161 million lobbying Congress in 2008—more than anyone but Big Pharma—and has, in recent years, fought hard against everything from clean-air laws to renewable-electricity mandates. Back in 2001, Southern Company, the coal-burning behemoth in the South whose lobbyists have been dubbed "kneecap-breakers," enlisted Haley Barbour to persuade George W. Bush to reverse his pledge to regulate carbon-dioxide. "Utilities have a strong lobbying presence," one congressional staffer told me. "Usually, all they have to say is that rates will go up or the system will be less reliable—it's not hard for them to throw those flags up and get what they want."

In recent years, however, reformers have begun sketching out a brighter, more alluring future for our electricity system. Rather than the old set-up in which power flows from a central plant miles away, distributed sources like rooftop solar panels and small gas plants would provide a greater share of power in towns and cities, lessening the need for costly transmission lines, while waste heat from industrial facilities and onsite generators could get recycled. Families could earn money by owning backyard wind turbines and selling power to neighbors. Meanwhile, an electronic smart grid would do the work of juggling all of these inputs: Network devices could tell nonessential appliances like hot-water heaters and dishwashers to shut off during high-demand hours and then run when the sun was shining or the wind was blowing, curtailing the need for the hundreds of peaking plants that roar to life for just a few hours each month.

Utilities would still operate the grid and, in many cases, power plants, but they'd also be providing a broader menu of services, such as selling energy-saving devices to help customers waste less power. The overall system would run more efficiently and cleanly, emitting less carbon. And, since our power would come from a dispersed array of sources, the system would be far more reliable, with fewer interruptions and blackouts.

This grand vision is hardly an idle fantasy. In Gainesville, Florida, homeowners can already earn a tidy income by lining their roofs with solar panels and selling electricity to the grid. In Boulder, Colorado, utility Xcel Energy is building a pilot smart grid, in which electricity prices freely fluctuate every few minutes and homeowners can use Internet apps to adjust energy use accordingly—shutting off appliances during periods of peak demand, or programming their plug-in hybrids to charge when electricity is cheap. And, in Austin, Texas, the municipal utility plays an active role in helping customers see how much energy they're needlessly wasting and financing fixes, such as duct repair and attic insulation for leaky homes. (Austin embarked on this program in 1982 after outcry over plans for a new coal plant; thanks to efficiency gains, the plant was never built.)

Still, these innovations won't spread without major regulatory changes—and, since current rules often benefit some powerful companies, that could mean serious state-by-state brawls.

Perhaps the most urgent state-level reform would be to alter how electricity rates are structured, so that utilities' profits don't just hinge on pumping as many electrons as possible through their wires. After all, there's broad consensus that the cheapest, fastest way to reduce carbon-dioxide emissions is to use power more prudently. Lawmakers have usually tried to do that through a blizzard of government mandates—from building codes to appliance standards. But these mandates only do so much if utilities are constantly trying to sell more power. So, a handful of states have tinkered with an approach called "decoupling," in which utilities are guaranteed a fixed revenue each year, and can increase profits by cutting costs and selling *less* power. In California, which pioneered decoupling back in 1982, energy use per capita has flattened (even as it's ballooned in most states), and utilities spent nearly $1 billion in 2008 on things like helping customers trade in their creaky, power-hogging fridges or promoting green buildings.

Yet many utilities and regulators are wary of abandoning a business model that has persisted for nearly a century. At a recent Edison Electric Institute event, when utility execs were asked to raise their hands if they were in favor of decoupling, the room was evenly split. "It's an intriguing idea, but it can be very difficult to explain to people," says Mike Morris, the CEO of American Electric Power and a decoupling opponent, who says he's skeptical regulators would allow utilities to keep revenues up even if sales plummeted. "You can almost hear the outcry down the road: 'You mean we're still paying you for fewer sales?' " Indeed, two years ago, in North Carolina, Duke Energy proposed its Save-A-Watt program, in which the utility would get paid for every power plant it could avoid building by resorting to efficiency measures. But the plan has so far been held up. In the meantime, without other ways to meet growing demand in the state, Duke is building a new coal plant—and asking for a hefty rate hike to finance it.

Next on the chopping block are barriers to local generation. Those large, remote power plants that utilities have long relied on are actually a fairly unwieldy way of making power: Not only is energy lost as electricity trundles through long transmission lines, but nearly two-thirds of the fuel used in power plants is squandered as heat. Many of those inefficiencies could be squeezed out if our system relied on a variety of smaller plants closer to population centers that reused their waste heat—say, to warm nearby buildings. Last December, a study from Oak Ridge National Lab found that these "combined heat and power" plants are roughly twice as efficient as our current plants, and a concerted push to deploy them could save the equivalent of half our current household fossil-fuel use.

Doing so wouldn't require glittery new technology. But, as Tom Casten found in

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trying to harvest Cabot's waste gas, the legal barriers are substantial. "The system is set up to encourage central generation," Casten says, pointing to rules like the ban on private wires, fees imposed on facilities that try to produce their own power, and the fact that regulators don't rightly value benefits from distributed generation, such as lower transmission costs or less pollution per unit of fuel.

The same goes for renewables. Thirty-one states now require utilities to get a fraction of their electricity from clean sources like solar and wind. So far, utilities have mostly trained their eyes on gigantic wind farms or vast solar arrays in the Southwest. Those plants will surely play a key role in a low-carbon future, but they also require pricey and unpopular new transmission lines, while desert solar projects have bogged down amid concerns they might spoil local ecosystems. That's why many companies now wonder if micropower—rooftop solar panels or small turbines, say—could help deliver a green-energy future faster than large projects alone. "It's long been conventional wisdom that it's much easier and cheaper to build those big plants," says Allan Schurr, v.p. of strategy and development at IBM's energy and utilities group. "But, when we interviewed customers, we found a strong appetite for individuals having control over their own energy future." Schurr points to Germany, where incentives for small-scale renewables transformed the cloudy country into a solar leader in just a few years.

Alas, here in the United States, state laws often make it difficult for small generators to connect to the grid, or for homeowners to get credit on their meter for energy they produce from rooftop panels. The nonprofit Network For New Energy Choices reports that, although 41 states allow some version of "net metering," most put up subtle roadblocks that make participation an undue hassle.

That's no accident. In many states, utilities aren't keen on individual producers muscling in on their turf. In New Mexico, the state's biggest utility, PNM, has filed a request to pare back tax incentives that help homeowners and businesses install their own solar panels. Even progressive utilities that are comfortable with local solar, like San Francisco's PG&E, have haggled over caps on net metering. Power companies, says Adam Browning, who directs the Vote Solar Initiative, "basically move along the five stages of grief—first there's denial, then bargaining, and, finally, acceptance. Getting to that final stage takes a big cultural shift."

One reform that most utilities do seem open to is the effort to develop an advanced smart grid, which would help them manage a more diverse power supply and identify grid failures more easily. But creating broad national standards remains a challenge, given the thousands of utilities and tech firms that all have their own ideas about what a smart grid should look like. And, at the state level, regulators often frown upon ventures into risky new technologies, such as Internet energy monitors or self-adjusting thermostats. "Utilities have historically made business decisions on new plants that last for twenty or thirty years," says Schurr. "We need to move to a set of rules that don't penalize them for adopting technologies that are likely to change very rapidly and may not always pan out."

That hardly exhausts the wish list of reformers, some of whom even talk about fostering competition among utilities, so that customers can choose from different retail providers. "The Enron debacle in California really poisoned the waters for that debate," says the Galvin Initiative's Kurt Yeager, who argues the lesson of California is that deregulation needs to be done properly, not that it shouldn't be done at all. "We need to understand that we could have a much better power system than the one we have now."

The climate bill currently percolating through Congress won't necessarily get us there—at least not on its own. It's true that a price on carbon will push the country toward a cleaner energy future, a hugely positive step. Yet many observers fret that the bill could cement the status quo in our antiquated, maddeningly inefficient power sector.

Consider the cap-and-trade portion of the legislation, in which the nation's emissions are capped at an overall limit and individual companies are given tradable pollution permits. The good news is that utilities are on board with this basic concept—if they weren't, the bill might not stand a chance in Congress. "About two-and-a-half years ago, we decided we wanted to take a proactive position on dealing with climate change," says Tom Kuhn, who heads the Edison Electric Institute, which lobbies on behalf of investor-owned utilities. "We had our CEOs working intensely on fleshing out what technologies would enable us to do this job, how the economics would work, how we'd mitigate costs to our consumers."

Partly because they played a central role, the bill that passed the House in June reflects a fairly parochial, utility-centric view of how best to move to a low-carbon future. The power industry lobbied to receive some 40 percent of the available permits for free from now until 2025. Not only that, but utilities will be allowed to buy offsets—paying someone else to plant trees or capture methane at landfills—in lieu of making reductions. "An electric utility burning coal will not have to reduce emissions at the plant site—it can just keep burning coal," conceded Virginia congressman Rick Boucher, who helped craft the legislation. That will buy utilities time until technology to sequester carbon from coal plants arrives—an uncertain prospect, but one that would let them maintain their existing business model. "They made a deal to try to freeze a reality that may or may not be able to be frozen," says Dave Hamilton, who runs the Sierra Club's global-warming program. (To be sure, the bill has mandates on utilities to buy renewable power and pursue efficiency, but they are fairly lenient—and the power sector has resisted attempts to strengthen them.)

To get a sense for what this path might look like, consider a recent study by the Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI), a think tank funded by the utility industry, which examined what it would take to reduce U.S. carbon emissions 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050. The report predicted that utilities would rely heavily on centralized "clean coal" and nuclear plants, with only a modest role for efficiency or renewables. That could turn out to be a more expensive, inefficient way of reducing emissions—EPRI projects that electricity prices could end up rising 80 percent by 2050. Still, there's plenty of reason to think utilities could win approval from regulators for such large, clunky plants—especially in the South, where state commissions tend to be fairly solicitous toward utilities.

Is this really the only way forward? I asked Yeager, who used to head EPRI before he left to work on reforming the grid, what he thought of the institute's report. "I think it's fair to say those projections are based on the idea that we'll see very marginal reforms to our electricity sector," he said. "The current regulatory model isn't at all being questioned."

While a carbon cap will certainly be a necessary start, fixing that model will involve far more laborious changes—at both the state and federal level. "I think that's one reason why, as a follow-on to cap-and-trade, we will likely see further discussions about utility regulatory structures," says Mark Brownstein, a former utility official who now works for the Environmental Defense Fund. "There's a lot of reason to think we're not done with that conversation." ◆

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

ATTITUDES, PLUS LOVE

David Foster Wallace's *Brief Interviews With Hideous Men* has been adapted for the screen. Well, parts of it have been adapted—chiefly, the four parts that bear the same title as the book and the film. Wallace's book is a miscellany of prose outbursts, some that soar in known styles, some that fling aside known styles, some of deliberate wildness. The book evokes much the same reaction as does Godard. Godard's films often convey that he thought his film-making talent was a curse; that he was doomed to use that talent in prescribed patterns, that he must try to explode those film-making patterns as drastically as possible yet still make his talent evident—at least, by letting viewers know that he was protesting. (For much the same reason, I thought, the avant-garde musician Henry Cowell played parts of his pieces with his elbows.)

Wallace's freehand writing did not faze John Krasinski, who made the screen adaptation. Krasinski, an established film and television actor, was enamored of Wallace's book. He took the four interview sections, most of which are not in usual Q&A shape—there are A sections without Qs, along with many other vagaries—and molded them into a series of relatively formal interviews. The shape of this film will astonish no viewer, which, in a peculiar way, is part of its eventual daring.

The interviews are conducted by a graduate student, a young woman, who is doing research for a dissertation on current male attitudes toward women. This dissertation device justifies and unifies the film. Almost all the settings are in a university—student union, classrooms, quads, and so forth. For a good while, we don't even see the questioner, we just see the male subjects answering her questions (though many of the responses are intercut with other material). None of the men has a name: they are Subject #15 or #51 and so on. Each of them is articulate and eager to respond: their attitudes toward women are very important to them. Each man brims with honesty—the contemporary honesty that is not far from ego. Even when the woman has a meeting with her professor in his office, he is honest with her about his wife.

BRIEF INTERVIEWS WITH HIDEOUS MEN
IFC Entertainment

35 SHOTS OF RUM
Cinema Guild

In the first shot a subject is seated against a brick wall, talking to us, and many shots are set against that wall. But the film varies visually: one man launches into his usual come-on spiel with women, a spiel that goes on seamlessly except that, in flashback, the women change frequently. One man "loves loves loves" women; another is viciously obscene about them. One man is marvelously successful with women and is about to reveal his secret when the sound suddenly fades. As décor and variation, two student waiters at a college party move out of their jobs from time to time to function as a chorus.

Most of these scenes, and many more, all of them extended or altered, are derived from Wallace's text, which Krasinski has combed and arranged for actors. The "hideous" in the title is a Wallace fillip. Reviewing the book in 2000, A. O. Scott wrote that "what is most striking about the interview subjects, and what they ultimately have in common, is their slippery, narcissistic ordinariness." Krasinski has applied a touch of cosmetics to them here and there, but never to conceal any hideousness. Only one scene, though it originates in Wallace, seems out of place. Another man remembers his father, a washroom attendant who spent his life handing out towels, cleaning basins, accepting tips, always dressed in white, even his shoes. The son, in his forties today, says he never wears white. The scene is so keen that even while we watch it, knowing that it has nothing to do with the dissertation in progress, we can't dislike the experience of it.

A surprising pleasure is the color. Clothes, walls, views please our eyes even as we listen to the talk. Amazingly, too, this film, which for the most part puts one or two people before us, was shot in wide-screen. Then we note that the cinematographer of this modest first film is John Bailey, one of the best (*Groundhog Day* and sixty-nine others). Apparently Bailey wanted to flout expectation, to show us that, contrary to rules, one or two people, imaginatively framed, can fill a wide screen.

Julianne Nicholson, who plays the dissertationist, left her verve at home. In most of her scenes she is just about present, which is acceptable when she is merely questioning. In the one scene outside the researching, in her apartment, she receives her ex-boyfriend, played by Krasinski. The trouble simmering between them is heated by Krasinski but is tepid with Nicholson. Timothy Hutton plays the professor with his usual ingratiating non-acting. All the other actors are vivid and interesting.

Ultimately this film is a quiet revelation. At first we may sniff at the form that has been imposed on Wallace's pyrotechnics. Gradually, however, we

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realize that we are sharing the fruit of a fifty-year development. When television arrived, a besetting fear in the early days was of "talking heads," one-shots or two-shots or even three-shots of people conversing. It seemed crude and static compared with the infinite variety of cinema. But in the following decades, our expectations have changed—or broadened. Charlie Rose and Larry King and many others have seduced us into intimacy as a usable replacement for visual variety. If the talk is good and the editing at least moderately nimble, the "talking heads" program has become one of the kinds of shows we want from television. This change may be one of the few cultural benefices of television. Krasinski's film is not the first—outside of documentaries—to lift it from the small screen to the large. (Remember *The Designated Mourner*.) But this film boldly plants that form here as an instance of cultural change. Krasinski has chastened a lot of Wallace's prose ventures, but he has ventured cinematically himself.

The French director Claire Denis has written, with Jean-Pol Fargeau, a screenplay about Parisians that is different. *35 Shots of Rum* concerns a fortyish railway driver, his twentyish student daughter, his ex-girlfriend, and the daughter's boyfriend, all of whom live in the same apartment house in three apartments. (Father and daughter live together.) The difference is that all these Parisians are black.

Denis began her career in 1988 with *Chocolat*, which dealt with a French girl and a black man in Cameroon. I haven't seen all of Denis's films since then and don't know how often she has returned to the subject of race, but she does so here, winningly and well, merely by (except for one sequence) paying no attention to it. These people simply are black, living their lives. Even in a sequence with two white women, race is not mentioned. Apparently all these people were originally from the Caribbean, live in a district centered on the Rue de la Guadeloupe, and thrive in their society.

Lionel, widowed a long time ago, and his daughter Josephine love each other and enjoy that love by doing everyday things every day. Their quiet pleasure in each other's company suffuses the screen. She is a student with a job in a record shop. One of her classes, with a black teacher and all-black students, is charged with racial anger. (Frantz Fanon is inevitably mentioned.) But though the paper being discussed that day is by Josephine, she never utters a word on a related subject outside the class. She, her father, and friends obviously expect their lives to go on like any others.

In a rueful way, this becomes too true—at least for Lionel. The time comes for change. Josephine is to leave, presumably with her boyfriend, who is off to somewhere in Africa. The film assumes a likeness to several Japanese films that are about the particular poignancy in a father whose care and nurture lead, inevitably, to loneliness (even though Lionel has previously asked her to feel free to leave). Woven through the central story is a minatory counterpoint about a colleague of Lionel's who retired and who finds that the job that filled his life was his life. We don't see Lionel taking any preparatory steps for himself, but we do see him discovering his colleague's fate.

Before Josephine leaves, he evidently wants her to be reminded of her mother. They drive to Lübeck in northern Germany and visit her mother's sister, white, affectionate, very German. Over coffee, race is never mentioned. Father and daughter visit the mother's grave. Then, back in Paris, comes their own parting.

The story is not exciting, but it is irresistible—because the people are endearing. We keep feeling not only that it is all credible but that we want the company of these two characters, and we wriggle a bit at the thought of their separation.

The title of the film is ungainly but not irrelevant. To drink thirty-five shots of rum in one sitting is a goal that apparently Lionel has set for some reason and has failed to reach. Nineteen is the max so far, done by one of his friends. (When Lionel comes home after one attempt, Jo kisses him and says—matter-of-factly, not reprovingly—"You smell sloshed." It's simply what Lionel does once in a while.) At the end, when she leaves, he makes it to thirty-five—and apparently holds them. We draw our own conclusions about the relation between that goal, Jo's leaving, and Lionel's future.

A cinematic reason for the film's pleasures is the way it looks. Denis quite clearly envisioned it before she shot a foot of it; and with the aid of her cinematographer, Agnes Godard, she has clothed the picture in mellow tones—nothing bright or cheery to underscore the congenial mood, blues and shadows for the most part, to convince that this good feeling occurs in reality, not a movie. Alex Descas is staunch yet vulnerable as Lionel, Mati Diop is a zephyr as Jo, Nicole Dogué is amiable as the ex-girlfriend, and Grégoire Colin burns appropriately as Jo's swain. Those who treasure Fassbinder films will be glad to see Ingrid Caven, one of his favorites, as the German aunt.

Along with the post-film glow, however, I'm still wondering about those thirty-five shots. ◆

@

Like the whorl of an out-of-this-world ear that had been lent
to an oak-gall wasp by a tenth century Irish monk
who would hold out oak-gall ink against the predicament
in which he found himself. . .

Like the ever-unfolding trunk
of the elephant in the room that gives such a bad vibe
it vies with your old hippie girlfriend who once lent such weight
to any argument to which you feared she might subscribe,
including her insistence we abbreviate
our most promising rlshps. . .

Like the scrolled-down tail
of a Capuchin monkey drawing on its inner strengths
as it hammers short-sighted snail against short-sighted snail
that has nonetheless gone to extraordinary lengths. . .

Like the tapeworm swallowed by a hippie who once was fat
but is now kind of bummed out you've lost track of where she's at.

PAUL MULDOON

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Jackson Lears

THE USEFULNESS OF CRANKS

Nature as a standpoint for social criticism.

I.

In contemporary public discourse, concern for "the environment" is a mile wide and an inch deep. Even free-market fundamentalists strain to display their ecological credentials, while corporations that sell fossil fuels genuflect at the altar of sustainability. Everyone has discovered how nice it is to be green. Will popular sentiment translate into public policy? There is reason to be skeptical.

After all, we have been here before. The pragmatic, ethical, and aesthetic arguments for conservation are roughly the same as they were in the 1970s—the only difference being that they have acquired even more urgency in the face of depleted oil reserves, fished-out oceans, and "climate change," the current euphemism for global warming. Yet contemporary politicians and pundits treat green concerns as if they were fresh discoveries. Their amnesia is an understandable response to recent history. For the last thirty years—despite the absorption of environmentalist slogans and sentiments into our popular culture, the frequent legal skirmishes on behalf of endangered species, and the spread of serious ecological thought into many academic disciplines—broad environmental concerns all but disappeared from mainstream political debate. Noble green intentions left little impact on everyday life. Quite the contrary: for most Americans it was as if the 1970s—the decade of the "energy crisis," *Small Is Beautiful*, and presidential commitments to solar energy—never happened. Who could be bothered with worry about waste amid acres of wired McMansions and herds of lumbering SUVs?

It will take historians many years to sort through the political, economic, and cultural wreckage left by Ronald Reagan and his ideological heirs. But the disappearance of ecological issues from the national agenda was an essential part of the devastation. Environmentalism was one of Reagan's targets from the beginning. During the campaign, he and his handlers shrewdly exploited Jimmy Carter's "malaise" speech of July 1979. Carter never used the offending word, though he did refer to an American "crisis of confidence," arising from the discovery that "owning things and consuming things does not satisfy our longing for meaning." Carter's big mistake was to question this accumulationist ethos in arguing for conservation as a "moral equivalent of war" and committing the government to long-term research into alternative energy sources. It was an extraordinarily prescient speech, one that acknowledged the limits to economic growth and anticipated nearly all the environmental themes that have only recently returned to fashion.

But it was a political disaster for Carter. Polls indicated that popular reaction to the speech was generally favorable, but then the chattering classes weighed in. By 1979 Carter's media stock had bottomed out. Pundit after pundit took Carter to task for having the temerity to blame the American people for their wasteful ways. Reagan, meanwhile, was prepared to argue that any talk about limits was un-American. This was the country where the sky was the limit. "America is back," he announced after his election. He lost no time in removing the solar panels from the White House roof. Three decades of denial were under way.

The story of Carter's speech is a cautionary tale for environmentalists. It suggests the ease with which environmentalists could be identified as puritanical moralists, dour pessimists, enemies of fun and the future. Carter's public persona reinforced this connection—his sober homiletical tone, his sloping shoulders, his overall limpness. Reagan tilted his head with practiced spontaneity, smiled his lemon-twist smile, and dispensed upbeat aphorisms as if they were freshly minted. His shoulders were padded and his posture was perfect. He was superbly suited to exorcise the demons of doubt, even when doubt had a strong foundation in reality.

And Reagan was not the only villain of this tale. The denial of environmental concerns was part of a broad cultural shift that also swept up the postmodern left. During the 1980s and 1990s, leftists were as likely as rightists to scold environmentalists for their allegedly puritanical preoccupation with limits—as Julian Simon did (from the right) in *The Ultimate Resource* in 1981 and Andrew Ross did (from the left) in *Strange Weather* in 1991. Ultimately this critique pushed beyond ethics to epistemology. At its most inane, the postmodern project challenged the very notion that something called "nature" existed apart from human constructions of it. By the late 1980s, no self-respecting professor in the humanities would use the word "nature," or even the word "reality," without inverted commas. The literary theorist Fredric Jameson revealed the social origins of this style when he announced that "postmodernism is what you have when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good"—a view that could be held only by an upper-class professional who spent most of his waking hours insulated from the natural world.

The bizarre notion that "nature is gone for good" had unintended political consequences. It neatly complemented the Republican right's equation of environmentalism with sentimental nostalgia. The postmodern Left and the reactionary Right deployed different idioms in a common celebration of the untrammeled individual. There was no room at this party for environmentalist killjoys.

But now, as we are constantly reminded, the party's over. The collapse of credit markets has produced a lot of loose talk about a return to fundamental values, to scrimping and saving and living within our means. But how these ideas and emotions will affect environmental policy or everyday practice remains to be seen. Decades of doctrinaire optimism, uniting everyone from Marxian social critics to development economists to free-market fundamentalists, have undermined the notion that there are natural limits to economic growth. Technological innovation, we have constantly been told, has rendered Malthusian scenarios obsolete.

But these assertions are based on flawed assumptions. Whatever its potential, green technology will take years, perhaps decades, to implement. Meanwhile the urgent need to restore high levels of economic growth by any means necessary—including renewed production of

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greenhouse gases and consumption of fossil fuels—will trump environmental protection. And the preoccupation with short-term priorities may well promote long-term disaster. A consensus of statistical estimates projects that global population could rise as much as 50 percent over the next forty years. This will probably intensify international competition for scarce resources as the world gets hotter. The techno-utopianism of the last thirty years will prove to have been a flash in the pan, and Malthus may yet have the last word: we shall rediscover that there are natural limits to growth after all.

This need to recognize limits and loss is what makes serious thinking about ecology so difficult for Americans. With respect to our secular religion of progress, ecological thought is deeply sacrilegious. By insisting on the interdependence of the human and nonhuman worlds, it challenges the sacred tenets of commodity civilization—the drive toward mastery of nature, the obsession with economic productivity, the deep utilitarianism that dismisses spiritual and aesthetic concerns as mere decoration and defines human advance as more things for more people. Consider how often "housing starts" are listed as an index of economic health, and how directly this reveals the American version of creative destruction: not renovating housing stock but making a mess and moving on, gobbling up land as we go.

The problem, from the ecological perspective, is the commitment to the utilitarian definition of progress that lies at the core of both capitalism and socialism—at the heart of modernity itself. To avoid sinking into a porridge of bland pieties, therefore, ecological thinking needs to preserve its anti-modern edge. This will make it a harder sell. Anti-modernism, which has lots of meanings, annoys lots of people. Writing in these pages not too long ago, Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger railed against "the revulsion at modern life" that they believe is crippling the environmental movement. In their view, anti-modernism is an effete affectation, cultivated by first-world elites who can afford to reject "the modern project of expanding prosperity" because they are already its beneficiaries. From this perspective, only those who have willingly traded their office jobs for "hard agricultural labor" have the right to question the beneficence of modernity.

The argument is bizarre, but it is not unprecedented. Apologists for economic growth have often dismissed its critics as nostalgic elitists unable to stomach the people's taste for shopping malls and suburban sprawl. By assuming, quite falsely, that these developments simply express consumer desire, real estate developers and corporate technocrats can pass themselves off as advocates for ordinary folk. Nordhaus and Shellenberger embody the quintessentially American desire to equate a particular construction of modernity with the good of democracy, and to celebrate their union in this best of all possible nations.

PARADISE FOUND: NATURE IN AMERICA AT THE TIME OF DISCOVERY
By Steve Nicholls
(University of Chicago Press, 524 pp., $30)

AMERICAN EARTH: ENVIRONMENTAL WRITING SINCE THOREAU
Edited by Bill McKibben
(Library of America, 1,047 pp., $40)

DEFENDING THE MASTER RACE: CONSERVATION, EUGENICS, AND THE LEGACY OF MADISON GRANT
By Jonathan Peter Spiro
(University of Vermont Press, 462 pp., $39.95)

A PASSION FOR NATURE: THE LIFE OF JOHN MUIR
By Donald Worster
(Oxford University Press, 535 pp., $34.99)

A REENCHANTED WORLD: THE QUEST FOR A NEW KINSHIP WITH NATURE
By James William Gibson
(Metropolitan Books, 306 pp., $27)

ECO BARONS: THE DREAMERS, SCHEMERS, AND MILLIONAIRES WHO ARE SAVING OUR PLANET
By Edward Humes
(Ecco Books, 367 pp., $25.99)

But this modernizing impulse has always co-existed with another American urge, an indigenous American wisdom. The nation on the cutting edge of modernity has also been "nature's nation," as Perry Miller called it decades ago—an Eden of astonishing fecundity, a land of fresh starts and fair hopes. Edenic visions were rooted in empirical observation. Historians have compiled a rich dossier of testimony from the early European explorers of North America, who were astounded by the unbounded natural plenitude of this New World and convinced that they had discovered the earthly paradise. The problem was that this new Eden posed as many temptations as the old one had done.

II.

In *Paradise Found*, Steve Nicholls has returned to this trove of evidence from a different perspective. An entomologist turned documentary film-maker, he wants to tell a cautionary tale about the squandering of untold resources, as well as to suggest some possibilities for replenishing them. He has produced a lumbering bear of a book, lurching from sixteenth-century narratives of discovery to contemporary reflections on wildlife management. It is marred by many grammatical errors, some of them egregious and risible. Here, for example, is Nicholls's description of a colonial foray into wildlife management: "the sturgeon caught had to be reported to the governor of the colony, or face the loss of both ears." Despite such jarring moments, though, the bumpy ride is worth the trouble. Nicholls powerfully evokes a pristine world that we have lost.

It was a world where yard-long "tortoyses" clambered about Roanoke Island, where great flocks of passenger pigeons blotted out the sky over the Susquehanna, and where huge reefs of oysters filtered the water of Chesapeake Bay, keeping it clear to depths of twenty feet or more. Repeatedly staging the primal scene of tired Europeans discovering "the sheer abundance of life" on a vast continent, Nicholls often asks questions such as this one: "What must it have been like to stand on the shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence and watch such great flotillas of whales passing so close you could almost touch them?"

Of course this New World was inhabited by humans as well. Indian people move in and out of Nicholls's narrative. Refusing to sentimentalize their noble savagery, he acknowledges that their relationship to the natural world was complex. They sometimes yielded to the temptations of plenitude, over-fishing and over-hunting certain species at certain times and places. They competed with deer and bear for food, and killed them as they had need of them. They practiced a semi-nomadic agriculture, burning underbrush to clear paths for hunters and creating glades of lush grass

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with "edge habitats" where beavers and rabbits and other small game flourished. Their park-like forests contained so many fruit and nut trees that the entire eastern woodland region may well have been one big Indian orchard. As Nicholls observes, citing the New England renegade Thomas Morton, the Indians "didn't live like paupers; they only seemed to do so to English eyes." In fact (though Nicholls does not say this) they resembled what the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins called "the original affluent society," in his classic book *Stone Age Economics*—a society that satisfied its wants by adjusting them to available resources. This was a form of ecological thinking, sanctioned by a cosmology that emphasized the interdependence of the human and the non-human worlds.

In the natural history of North America, the politically correct view turns out to be also the empirically accurate one. The serpent in this garden was the white man. Overwhelmed by the presence of plenitude, he was seduced into the belief that it was limitless. Christianity and capitalism reinforced that assumption. Throughout the eighteenth century, English ships routinely stopped at Newfoundland to herd great auks on board, where hungry sailors clubbed the hapless birds to death by the hundreds. As one seaman said, it was "as if God had made the innocency of so poor a creature to become such an admirable instrument for the sustenation of man." Admirable, that is, until it was driven to extinction in the early 1800s.

Inhabiting a human-centered cosmos, Europeans could not grasp that the "sustenation of man" might also require the sustenation of animals. Indians had killed their fellow creatures, while they had also recognized their mutual dependence. But with the establishment of the fur trade, animals became commodities: Indians and whites alike piled up beaver pelts to satisfy the demands of distant consumers for the latest fashion in hats. Well before the American Revolution, the globalization of capital was already under way, with catastrophic consequences for the New World Eden.

Heedless waste became normal practice, in whaling as in other extractive industries. During the early nineteenth century, whalers began to deploy a technique they called "blasting," which involved harpooning humpback whales indiscriminately, letting their bloated bodies eventually float to the surface, and then recovering about a third of them. The other two-thirds were left to rot. Such methods took a toll: the apparently limitless supplies of whales and oysters, sturgeon and cod, gradually revealed their limits. By the mid-1800s, some animal species—great auks and passenger pigeons among them—had disappeared altogether. It was about this time that American nature writing began to take an anti-modern turn, led by Thoreau.

Previous naturalists, from William Bartram to Thomas Jefferson, may have distrusted cities but rarely drew a bead on modernity itself. They were men of the Enlightenment, believers in progress. Thoreau was not. He questioned the fundamental American faith, and became the first of many environmental writers to risk being labeled a tree-hugging wacko. His intellectual progeny include John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry, Rachel Carson, Edward Abbey, and Robinson Jeffers, among others—outsiders who have challenged utilitarian definitions of well-being and indeed the very notion of a human-centered cosmos. This is the critique, the philosophical standpoint, at the core of ecological thought; and part of its strength derives from its crankiness, its refusal to compromise with the common sense of the larger society. Indeed, "crank" is a convenient label for any dissenter from received wisdom. This may be why attempts to move environmentalism into the charmed circle of responsible opinion so often slide into technocratic moralism—an idiom that may be powerful in making policy but is anemic in inspiring commitment. Respectability is a crucial component of political impact, but it comes at a price.

The case of Bill McKibben offers an interesting example. Few writers could be more decent or sensible, most of the time. It is difficult to object to McKibben's arguments for conservation and against consumption, for less watching of television and more walking in the woods. He rightly insists on the reality of limits, in a way that the celebrants of endless growth describe as blinkered piety. This is usually a groundless dismissal, but sometimes the blinkers are all too apparent. They distort McKibben's view of recent history, aligning him with conventional wisdom and alienating him from potential allies.

Now McKibben has edited *American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau*, for the Library of America. It is a rich and rewarding collection—once one gets past McKibben's introduction, which reveals some of the symptomatic weaknesses in his ahistorical sentiments. Though he includes Thoreau, Muir, and other classic figures, he ignores such eighteenth-century naturalists as Bartram and Jefferson, and admits that he has weighted the anthology toward writing from "the years since 1980—the years since Ronald Reagan took office and the long-standing bipartisan commitment to environmental reform collapsed, the years when the systemic nature of our trouble came more sharply into focus. And the years when a kind of hyperindividualism became not just one strand in the American psyche, but pretty much the sole ideology of a continent." So far, this is reasonably accurate. The trouble starts when McKibben traces the origin of hyper-individualism to "the great carnival of individual liberation that we know as hippiedom." Forget Reagan, James Watt, Milton Friedman, and the other capitalist fundamentalists dismantling environmental policy in the name of personal liberty. The real culprits were the hippies.

This is a grotesque distortion of our recent past, and an odd slander of the counterculture. In fact, the deepest countercultural impulse was rooted in reaction against corporate-sponsored fantasies of limitless accumulation. "Hippiedom"—in urban as well as agrarian settings—was founded on the notion that freedom from the hamster cage of earning and spending required resistance to the accumulationist ethos. To be sure, there was no shortage of hypocritical posturing—many a rock star renounced possessions while he acquired prime real estate and piled up profits. But our collective journalistic memory, by focusing on hip poseurs, has trivialized the significance of certain countercultural values for the legions of non-celebrities who took limits seriously. From the late 1960s through the 1970s, the desire to avoid bourgeois entrapment inspired countless experiments in making do with less, in fashioning ingenious ways to minimize consumption of scarce resources—the sort of ingenious experiments that filled *The Whole Earth Catalog*. The recognition of limits, for the best (which was not always the majority) of the counterculture, was not a regime of renunciation but a portal of possibility. All of these countercultural tendencies resonated with the anti-modern core of environmental thought.

McKibben's ignorance of recent cultural history allies him with other caricaturists of "the Sixties," many of whom have little use for his environmental politics. Born in 1960, he is as eager as most of his contemporaries to locate the source of current ills in the misbehavior of people a decade or so older than himself. "The general ethic of 'do your own thing,'

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of marching to a different drummer—all of which traces back in some way toward Thoreau—came at a cost," he writes. "We were liberated to be hyperindividualists, in a way few humans had ever before been. In the decades since, that liberation has been experienced mainly through consumption." Given the simplemindedness of this capsule cultural history, and its utter failure to address larger questions of political economy, it comes as no surprise when McKibben asserts that "the ultimate vehicle of choice for the '60s generation" was the SUV. Enough already. Haven't we had our fill of ignorant intergenerational polemics?

Despite McKibben's feckless introduction, he has assembled a sterling group of environmental thinkers. Many of them did their best work or reached their largest audiences during the era of allegedly hyper-individualist hippiedom, though McKibben does not acknowledge this inconvenient truth. The popularizing scientists are here—Rachel Carson, E. O. Wilson, Loren Eiseley, with their compelling orchestration of particulars; and so are the lyricists of the quotidian—Annie Dillard, Barry Lopez. Scattered throughout the volume are examples of investigative journalism, recalling the variety and vitality of that disappearing genre. The most memorable is Berton Roueche's *New Yorker* account of a toxic fog that killed twenty people in Donora, Pennsylvania in 1948—a reminder, as McKibben observes, of how lethal the industrial atmosphere could be before the Clean Air Act. We are also offered the genteel ruminations of the nature writer Edwin Way Teale, who for all his avoidance of controversy could nevertheless be clear: "The difference between utility and utility plus beauty is the difference between telephone wires and the spider's web." Teale's critique of mere instrumentalism surfaces elsewhere in the volume—in the loping absurdity of Gary Snyder's "Smokey the Bear Sutra," the understated clarity of Wendell Berry's "The Making of a Marginal Farm," and the deft ironies of Edward Abbey's assault on "industrial tourism" in the wilderness of southern Utah. Robinson Jeffers, alas, gets only two short poems. The worldview of his poetry, what he called his "inhumanism," deserves more, for its refusal of modernist self-absorption, its rejection of a utilitarian creed, and its alternative to a human-centered cosmos. Jeffers's oeuvre is a powerful poetic expression of an ecological ethic: a recognition of the interdependence of all life leads to a deep respect for the moral claims of the nonhuman world.

III.

To attack humanism in the name of a non-human morality is to place oneself outside the liberal tradition, on the side of nature, in a position that seems lyrical and even mystical, and consequently to risk appearing a crank, or worse. This has long been a problem for ecological thinkers. Liberal humanists, who are rightly vigilant about other, more malign forms of "inhumanism" and inhumanity, have always felt a little skittish around ecological critiques of modernity. Sometimes they seem to see environmentalism as the first step on the slippery slope to soil worship. They can cite disturbing examples on both sides of the Atlantic. Hitler, they remember, was a fervent nature lover. National Socialism celebrated rural rootedness, and Jews (like intellectuals generally) were attacked as "rootless cosmopolitans." Similar racist themes animated conservationists in early twentieth-century America, as Jonathan Spiro's biography of Madison Grant reveals. The history of environmentalism is not entirely edifying.

Grant's ruling-class credentials were in order. Born to a prominent New York family in 1865, a Yale man and nonpracticing attorney who lived off his investments, Grant was a founder of the American Museum of Natural History and a member of the Boone and Crockett Club (an elite group of sport hunters who included Theodore Roosevelt, Henry Cabot Lodge, George Eastman, and other notables). A savior of the redwoods, Yosemite Valley, and other natural treasures, Grant deserves to be ranked alongside Roosevelt, Muir, and Gifford Pinchot, Roosevelt's chief of the U.S. Forest Service, as one of the key figures in the creation of an American conservation movement.

Grant was also a fervent Anglo-Saxon supremacist who popularized the scientific racism of his time in 1916 in *The Passing of the Great Race*—a compendium of conventional wisdom that sought to sound the alarm over swarming immigrants, rallying its WASP readers to greater fecundity. The book was widely praised (except in The New Republic, where the anthropologist Franz Boas pointed out the flimsiness of the category "race" and observed that Grant's maps were "entirely fanciful in their details"). Roosevelt sent Grant an admiring letter about the book, and F. Scott Fitzgerald put Grant's ideas in the mouth of Tom Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby*. Buchanan was just the sort of truculent, privileged airhead who would have been eager to display his intellect by citing middlebrow race science. *The Passing of the Great Race* captured the racial hysteria that bubbled barely beneath the surface of American popular culture in the 1910s and 1920s. And it made Madison Grant more famous for his race theory than for his conservation efforts.

Spiro never tires of exclaiming at the incongruity of the two roles, but maybe they were not as incongruous as he thinks. He describes Grant as an aesthetic preservationist rather than a utilitarian conservationist, but his evidence suggests a complex interchange between the two approaches, and a slippage from aesthetics to utility. In Grant's early career the aesthetic emphasis dominated, as he shifted his attention from regulating hunting to protecting endangered species to preserving scenery. The concern with scenery was pre-ecological: Grant had no sense of the need to preserve bio-diversity as a basis for a sustainable ecosystem. The language had not been invented yet. But like many of his contemporaries, he did value the sublimity of wilderness as a source of spiritual renewal, and that sentiment helped pave the way to a broader environmentalist outlook, and ultimately to an ecological ethic.

Meanwhile, as Spiro notes, Grant began to use "conservationist means to achieve preservationist ends," arguing that Glacier National Park could be a water supply as well as a spectacular landscape. Grant's utilitarian preoccupations intensified as he began to glimpse the contradictions inherent in wildlife management. Starting out with a hunter's desire to protect endangered game, he soon realized that when protected creatures proliferated, they threatened their own habitat. He found himself drawn to the potent phrase "survival of the fittest," which pervaded elite circles by the early twentieth century. Managing the wild, it appeared, would involve selective breeding and weeding out the weak—a kind of animal eugenics. It was only a short step, for Grant, from culling inferior elks to culling inferior humans. Breeding was all.

In spotlighting the connection between wildlife management and eugenics, Spiro has put his finger on something important. The obsession with improving breeding stock linked Grant with Hitler on the right and with other more respectable eugenicists on the left, including Margaret Sanger (who promoted birth control) and Theodore Roosevelt (who hated it). Sanger wanted "to breed a race of human thoroughbreds," while Roosevelt warned Anglo-Saxons against "race suicide." Eugenics sanctified the marriage of racism and modernity. Throughout the 1910s and

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1920s, the leaders of the American Eugenics Society dressed in white and paraded their obsessions with purity, organizing Fitter Families competitions, counterposing Nordics against the menace of Jews and other immigrants, not to mention the even greater menace of Negroes. When Grant argued that the health of the body politic required restricting the flow of foreigners to our shores, Roosevelt agreed. "The national gizzard cannot masticate more," he wrote. Grant's eugenic vision was ruling-class conventional wisdom, consistent with managing immigrants as well as managing wildlife.

Still, despite the prominence of men such as Grant in the early conservation movement, environmentalism was never organically tied to racism. In fact, Grant's older contemporary Muir, who helped found the Sierra Club in 1892, was ultimately far more influential than Grant. Muir was neither a patrician nor a racist. He partook of the class and racial prejudices of his time—including a comparative indifference to the human inhabitants of the wilderness he wanted to save. But ultimately he was sui generis, as Donald Worster's biography reveals.

Few scholars could be better qualified than Worster to assess John Muir's place in the American environmental tradition. Having grown up on the impoverished margins of agricultural life in the irrigated West, Worster began exploring the relations between humans and nature long before professional historians were paying any attention to the subject. His *Dust Bowl* (1979) remains the classic work on the great man-made ecological catastrophe of the 1930s. Over the last quarter of a century, he has played the leading role in creating the field of environmental history, producing a series of pathbreaking books on ecological thought and its consequences (or lack of them). Now he has turned his talents to Muir, the iconic mountain man.

Worster wants to cleanse Muir of crankiness, and to claim him for the American democratic tradition. And this argument implies a broader one—that ecological thought, far from being a reactionary assault on modernity, was actually rooted in "modern liberal democratic ideals." For Muir and other ecological thinkers, Worster argues, a concern for human rights, personal liberty, and social equality led to a respect for the otherness of nature and the interdependence of all things. Tocqueville noted an organic connection between democracy and pantheism, and Worster thinks the idea has legs. "Social deference faded in wild places," he writes. "Nature offered a home to the political maverick, the rebellious child, the outlaw or runaway slave, the soldier who refused to fight, and, by the late nineteenth century, the woman who climbed mountains to show her strength and independence." Romantics from William Wordsworth to Frederick Jackson Turner found wildness to be an alternative to familiar hierarchies.

Muir, in Worster's account of him, was a part of this tradition: "a liberal, a democrat, and a conservationist." Rejecting his Calvinist upbringing, he embraced "a more positive, hopeful view of human nature along with a more positive view of nature." Eager to expand the liberal ideal of human brotherhood to include all sentient beings, he "arrived at moral positions more advanced than many of his contemporaries." His inclusive vision made him part of the march of Enlightenment and progress.

Yet Worster is too smart a historian to overlook the tensions between ecology and liberal democracy, or to ignore the contradictions in Muir's own life and thought. Worster observes that alongside the popularity of pantheism Tocqueville also predicted the coming of an "industrial aristocracy" to America, "one of the hardest [aristocracies] that have appeared on the earth." Making money in America would often involve indifference to the rights of human beings, let alone bears, wolves, buffalo—and the ground squirrels that flourished in the orchards of California's Central Valley. When Muir married the daughter of a prosperous California fruit grower and took over the management of the family holdings, he had to elide the fundamental conflict between coercing nature and coexisting with it. When he sought alliances with members of the "industrial aristocracy," he had to overlook their willingness to plunder the wild for profit while they set aside selected areas for preservation.

Muir's effort to expand the range of liberalism and democracy was constantly confronting the limits imposed by capitalism. Worster understands those limits well. His entire career constitutes a critique of the destructive elements in the ethos of development. Yet as he tries to bring Muir—and ecological thought in general—into harmony with liberal democracy, the strain sometimes shows: Muir cannot be easily melded with the march of democratic progress. This is the only flaw in what is otherwise a superb biography.

Worster brilliantly recreates Muir and his world in all their complexity. His account of the early conservation movement reveals the myriad tensions between management and preservation—for example, the many compromises Muir had to make to enlist the likes of Edward Harriman, railroad magnate and preservationist par excellence, in the ranks of the Sierra Club. Worster understands the deep contradictions between ecological concerns and economic growth. That may be why his effort to assimilate Muir to the Enlightenment project is not entirely persuasive. From an ethical perspective, there is something profoundly appealing about making universal rights genuinely universal, about extending the reach of humanism to the non-human world. But the obstacles to that aim, as Worster's own account makes clear, are deeply embedded in the ways Americans, including Muir, have thought about nature. The ascendance of an ecological perspective requires more than a Manhattan Project for green technology. It means an end to anthropomorphism, a seismic shift in how we imagine our relation with the non-human world. Muir's story reveals how even the most clear-headed ecological thinker could find himself backing into compromises with capitalist development.

Muir was born in 1838 on the east coast of Scotland, in Dunbar, a grim fortress of the Calvinist Church of Scotland, where fifty-three pubs served an officially abstemious population. Adam Smith grew up across the Firth of Forth, in Kirkaldy; and the common sense of the locals reflected Smith's dual emphasis on inbred moral sense and individual effort. In John Muir's recollection, his mother Ann was almost invisible and his father Daniel was omnipresent, a self-made man who became a successful grain merchant on the high street of Dunbar. Daniel was a domineering, restrictive patriarch; his son often fled his oppressive rule. But he stuck to the high street and never ventured to the port: he was walled in even when he felt free, a dutiful son who nurtured tender feelings for wild creatures but never had any problem with slaughtering pigs.

Daniel himself was restless. By the time John was ten, his father could no longer ignore what Worster calls "the religious worm that had long been gnawing at his vitals"—the suspicion that no church could adequately represent the gospel of Christ. Deeply mistrustful of all institutions and determined to be his own clergyman, he fell in with the Secessionist followers of Alexander Campbell, who renounced clerical authority and relied on lay preachers. Pockets of Seces-

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sionists were settling in North America, where they imagined their egalitarian views would flourish. Fired with dreams of freedom, the Muirs took passage for New York in January 1849.

Daniel headed for Wisconsin, looking for an independent life on the land. Eventually he landed in the woods near Pardeeville, forty miles from Madison. John recalled the "sudden plash into pure wildness" after the gray streets of Dunbar. Appalled (he later said) by the colonists' wasteful ways, he spent hours in the woods, acquainting himself with blue jays, hawks, woodpeckers, frogs, and snapping turtles. There was more about those creatures in his autobiography than about his two brothers and five sisters. Nature was an escape from his father's bullying domination. "We were all made slaves," Muir wrote, "through the vice of over-industry."

As Daniel flailed about, overextending himself, buying too much land to farm well, John strayed beyond his father's influence. No doubt thinking of Daniel's failures, John listened receptively to a neighbor's criticism of white settlers' farming methods, inept by comparison with the aborigines they had dispossessed. He read Alexander von Humboldt's journals and dreamed of travel. Yearning to be free, he also sought self-mastery, immersing himself in a basement workshop. From scraps of wood and pegs and ropes, he fashioned a variety of machines meant to discipline the body—a collection of cobbled-together alarm clocks and a bed that would dump him out at a specified hour, usually one-o-clock in the morning, so he could get in a few hours of tinkering before his farm chores started.

All this makes Muir seem remarkably similar to Frederick Winslow Taylor, the obsessive-compulsive "father" of scientific management. In Worster's view, however, Muir's machines "often had less to do with factory production or rural mechanization than with self-improvement and self-redemption." Committed to Calvinist habits, Muir strained (if only half-consciously) toward what Worster calls "a more liberal, free-form faith and piety." His ultimate destination, if not his precise intention, was a romantic and democratic religion of nature.

For several years his path to that end shuttled between Pardeeville and the state university at Madison, where he enrolled in 1860 and was soon taken up by Ezra Carr, a professor of chemistry who gave the religion of nature a scientific gloss. "Nature is the name for an effect whose cause is God," Muir's lecture notes recorded. Carr became Muir's mentor and Carr's wife Jeanne his feminine ideal. For a scared, strange country boy, they gave the religion of nature a warm domestic habitat.

Madison was a hotbed of Unionist fever, but Muir remained immune to it. The strident nationalism of his fellow students seemed forced, the preservation of the union an abstract and unconvincing excuse for killing other human beings.

Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir, 1906

(To judge by Worster's evidence, the destruction of slavery was not on the students' agenda.) And in 1863, when the nationalist fervor faded and the volunteers proved insufficient, the federal draft law allowed inductees to purchase substitutes—making the sectional conflict officially a rich man's war and a poor man's fight. That slogan originated in this era and spread quickly among young men without means. Muir was one of them. Lonely and restless and reluctant to be drafted, he finally "skedaddled" to Canada in early 1864, though he was in no immediate danger of being called up.

For two years he wandered through Canada, "a man without any fixed identity or ambitions of his own," in Worster's words, who melded aesthetics and piety in his developing attachment to the natural world. Along the Hollander River north of Toronto, he came across a field of orchids blooming on a barren hillside in the early June sun. He was thrilled to tears. The scene was "so perfectly spiritual, it seemed pure enough for the throne of the Creator." Still half-attached to orthodox habits of mind, he became convinced that the biblical injunction to subdue the earth by the sweat of one's brow was not a divine command but a consequence of human perversity. What were weeds, anyway, he asked his journal: "are not all plants beautiful? Or in some way useful? The curse must be within ourselves." In the sublimity of nature, man was a bumbling and destructive interloper.

When the war ended, Muir, like many other draft evaders, returned to the United States, with no moral disgrace or legal consequences. Feeling "utterly homeless" among a transient proletariat, he went to work as a skilled mechanic in a wagon-wheel factory in Indianapolis, where he still harbored Taylorite visions of harmonizing men and machines even while he yearned for wildness. Contradictions multiplied as he fell in with the Hoosier Yankee Samuel Merrill (who later founded the Bobbs-Merrill publishing house) and his family. At one hour in the day he sipped tea in the Merrills' parlor, discussing Lamartine and religious liberalism; at another he wielded a wrench in the factory, dreaming of ways to organize the work more effectively.

But one day everything changed. Muir lost the vision in his right eye when he poked it with a file, and within a few hours the left eye went out too. He went home to his bare rented room, terrified, slipping into despair. For weeks he could not see. Writing from Madison, Jeanne Carr tried to comfort him, telling him that "God had given him 'the eye within the eye, to see in natural objects the realized ideas of His mind.'" Soon the left eye came back and the Merrills found him an oculist, who reassured him that the injured eye would heal itself in a few months. But the temporary blindness set off a psychic transformation in Muir. Jeanne's transcendentalist urgings had helped to shape his future. When his sight returned, he abandoned the shop floor and all Taylorite dreams of streamlining it. Stopping

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off in Wisconsin to bid his father a bitter goodbye, he took off for South America, on foot. He carried a notebook inscribed "John Muir, Earth-planet, universe."

IV.

The long walk southward offered Muir an escape from conventional expectations, and an intimacy with the poor folk (black and white) who offered him shelter and—occasionally—a revelation. When he slept on a grave in the Bonaventure cemetery in Savannah, he came to believe that death was not a form of punishment (as in his father's Calvinism), but a fulfillment of "harmony divine." He also contracted malaria. Nature was a killer as well as a beauty.

A long convalescence in Florida gave him time to turn decisively against anthropocentrism. He gave up hunting for sport and began to extend the language of rights to the moral claims of non-human creatures. Nature, he began to realize, was not made especially for man, and human salvation was not the central drama in the world. Rather it was "God's slow, inscrutable unveiling of a natural world that existed before and will exist long after the human species." With his sense of his own limitations intensifying, Muir set off for Cuba, where he slipped into a listless torpor amid unrelieved humidity. Spotting an advertisement for steamers to California, he escaped to the cooler, drier place that would be the center of his being for the rest of his life.

He made his way to the foothills of the Sierra Nevada, earning his bread as a farm laborer and a shepherd, trying to leave sufficient time for long hikes and patient observation. The summer of 1869 proved to be, in Worster's words, "a long moment of ecstasy that he would try to remember and relive to the end of his days." He was struck by a vision of cosmic harmony that recalled Wordsworth's in the Lake District, but also prefigured the ecological perspectives of the twentieth century: "when we try to pick out anything by itself," he wrote, "we find it hitched to everything else in the universe." Here was an alternative to the rigid Christian dualism of his youth. With the summer over, he signed on as a millwright and carpenter for a hotel owner in Yosemite Valley, built a cabin nearby, offered his services as a guide to the swelling crowd of tourists, and gradually became a local character.

Meanwhile he was immersing himself in the Sierra Nevada. For Muir, as Worster writes, mountaineering became "a way of gathering knowledge about the history of the earth, a pathway to revelation and worship." He would have loved to join the California State Geological Survey, which included the geologists Josiah Whitney and Clarence King, but he lacked the academic credentials. His rambles led him to the new science of glaciology; and before long he had discovered many moving bodies of ice grinding against boulders—active glaciers in the Sierra Nevada. His fame as a source of local knowledge eventually reached Washington, and the Smithsonian Institution requested him to write up reports on his explorations.

Despite Whitney's disdain for "campfire science," Muir pressed forward, publishing a series on mountain glaciers in the *Overland Monthly* that was later compressed into an article for the Annals of the American Academy. He rejected the "catastrophism" of Whitney (and the Bible), which assumed rock formations to be the outcome of discrete events, in favor of a "uniformitarian" approach which emphasized slow, incremental (or glacial) change, and required "deep time" to unfold. Muir liked the notion of human insignificance implied by deep time, even if it provoked the hostility of his father, the scriptural literalist. Embracing Darwinian evolutionary theory, he rejected the Social Darwinist obsession with ruthless struggle in nature. The cosmos, however violent, was ultimately "hitched together," harmonious.

For the next decade, Muir made a name for himself as a naturalist—perhaps the last self-taught one to acquire professional legitimacy. His authority depended on attachment to a place. For a while he could not bring himself to leave it, despite offers to study at MIT and to return to Madison. He combined mountaineering and writing for the San Francisco *Evening Bulletin*, where he celebrated the Sierra Nevada in conventional terms as "Nature's rest cure." And in 1874, after visiting a salmon hatchery in northern California, he recorded what he thought was a turning point in American history: the recognition that "neither our 'illimitable' forests or ocean, lake, or river fisheries are now regarded as inexhaustible." Muir trudged up and down the state, debunking the popular theory that sequoia trees were dying out (so might as well be cut down anyway), and demanding preservation of "God's First Temples" and regulation of timber cutting. Combining aesthetic preservation and utilitarian conservation, he groped toward a pragmatic vision of trees as a renewable resource—now a cliché of lumber-industry advertising, but in the slash and burn 1870s a genuine breakthrough.

In June 1879, Muir became engaged to Louise (Louie) Strentzel, the daughter of a prominent farmer. Within days after the betrothal, he was off to Alaska, where he witnessed the devastation of the indigenous Inupiat culture, explored more active glaciers, and forged a common bond of fear with a dog named Stickeen as they made their way across a treacherous crevasse. It was another key moment in Muir's developing empathy for the non-human world.

When he returned he married Louie, and took to tending orchards with her father. Muir embraced the Darwinian perspective that the farmer and breeder should turn to nature for inspiration—that wild species were to be emulated rather than destroyed. But overall, as Worster notes, Muir was "a cautious businessman rather than an agronomic revolutionary." He poisoned squirrels, he boiled insects, he separated farming from wildness. Agriculture appealed to the manager in Muir, to the technovisionary. He made more money than anyone else in his family ever had, shared some of it with his siblings, reconciled with his dying father, and fathered two daughters of his own. It was a pastoral interlude in a peaceable kingdom.

As he ascended in status, he began to socialize with some of the upper-class men who were starting the conservation movement—the sort of men who, back east, might join the Boone and Crockett Club. In 1889, Robert Underwood Johnson, editor of *The Century*, commissioned him to write a series of articles on the high country surrounding Yosemite Valley, urging the creation of a National Park there. When Muir returned from a trip to Alaska, where he had been collecting botanical specimens, both Yosemite and Sequoia National Park had been created by Congress. Preservation and conservation were working in tandem; national parks protected sublime scenery and crucial watersheds. When his father-in-law died in 1890, Muir inherited $235,000 (about $4 million in contemporary dollars) and became a certified member of the landowning elite.

The following year William Ames, a professor of English at Berkeley, proposed the idea of the Sierra Club to Muir, and Muir agreed to serve as its first president. The bearded prophet, coming down from the mountain, found himself rubbing shoulders with the cultural elite of San Francisco, Boston, and New York, who begged for after-dinner stories of Stickeen. Muir believed that the rich

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could be useful allies in the fight to preserve wilderness. The railroad magnate Edward Harriman, for example, was not only a boon companion on voyages to Alaska, but also an advocate of expanding national parks.

To be sure, there were tensions among the conservation elite. Appointed by the secretary of the interior to the U.S. Forest Commission, Muir found himself at odds with Gifford Pinchot, who supported sheep grazing on public lands. But Muir considered himself a moderate on economic growth. As Worster remarks, he believed that "abundance could continue if selfish people did not destroy the land's capacity for regeneration." Amid the rancorous class conflict of the era, he nourished the hope that society could become as harmonious as he imagined nature to be.

His friend Theodore Roosevelt shared that hope. In 1903, Roosevelt invited Muir to join him for a four-day camping trip in Yosemite National Park. In convivial campfire conversation, Muir secured an agreement to make the Yosemite Valley part of the National Park. Roosevelt opposed grazing on public lands and believed "wise use" included aesthetic and spiritual as well as economic values. This made it easy for Muir to overlook Roosevelt's love of war and hunting. What Muir did not see was that Roosevelt's cult of manly will could also reinforce his commitment to canonical ideas of progress, leaving him a less than reliable ally in subsequent environmental controversies. Like many men before and since, Muir was simply smitten by TR. Never before, Muir said, had he had "so interesting[,] hearty, and manly a companion." Despite their differences over what constituted manliness, Muir admitted that "I fairly fell in love with him."

The collaboration with Roosevelt marked the apogee of Muir's public career. By then he had completed two books, *The Mountains of California* (1894) and *Our National Parks* (1901), which articulated his mature view of how humans might fruitfully interact with wild nature. As Worster summarizes Muir's perspective: "We cannot find in nature any soothing escape from history, impermanence, strife, or death. But learning how nature manages that change and how it generates a unified complexity is good tonic for the troubled, careworn human mind." Rejecting sentimental anthropomorphism, recognizing that nature was more than a stage set for aesthetic rapture, Muir nevertheless acknowledged that the wilderness experience could have a therapeutic dimension.

In Worster's telling, Muir was a prophet of a post-Protestant ethic of nature worship, elevating leisure over work and reverence for the non-human world over humanist hubris. And yet Muir preserved a vestigial attachment to aestheticism, which justified his distinction between ordinary and extraordinary nature. In his view, extraordinary nature—Yellowstone, Yosemite, the Grand Canyon—could not be developed. Only ordinary nature could. One example of ordinary nature was the Klamath Basin in Oregon, a cold and forbidding desert where water collected seasonally in shallow wetlands and lakes, and huge flocks of migrating waterfowl stopped for sustenance. Harriman wanted to build a railroad through it, and the federal government collaborated by authorizing a mammoth reclamation project to convert the Klamath marshes to agricultural land—though the place was unsuitable for farming. The reclamation plan was an ecological disaster. But Muir had no problem with it. Despite his belief that everything in nature was "hitched to everything else," some parts of nature were more expendable than others. His embryonic ecological perspective was compromised by his aesthetic distinction between ordinary and extraordinary nature. Only the sublime could not be spoiled.

The consequences of this inconsistency could be catastrophic. This became apparent in Muir's losing battle to save the Hetch Hetchy Valley from the city of San Francisco, which wanted to flood it for a reservoir to supply the city's growing population with water. As the debate wore on, all of Muir's rich friends deserted him, including Roosevelt. As Worster observes, the arguments pitted development and progress against "an unstable, incompatible mix of recreation and religion that [the opponents of the reservoir] called 'scenery.'" In fact, Muir and his allies could have made a stronger case, by demanding a deeper notion of "wise use" than the one deployed by the advocates of the reservoir, by observing that the city had several good and affordable alternatives for expanding its water supply, and by noticing that the Hetch Hetchy project was primarily a means of enriching a few contractors and their cronies. But they left themselves vulnerable to dismissal as romantic aesthetes, and ultimately they were defeated by the ideologues of economic growth.

By 1914, when it became clear that he had lost the battle for Hetch Hetchy, Muir was old, sick, and alone. His wife had died in 1905, his daughters had married men he did not like and had moved away. Struggling to "get something worthwhile off my hands before dark," he tried to write but found it hard to breathe and made forays into climes warmer and drier than the Alhambra Valley in winter. He died alone in a Los Angeles hospital on Christmas Eve in 1914. Admiring obituaries proliferated, and in the decades since his death Muir's stature has grown steadily.

Worster's tribute is the most capacious of all. He applauds Muir for extending the idea of egalitarianism beyond the human species and in effect becoming the first "eco-democrat." It is an appealing claim, and argued with convincing detail. Muir's vision was large and generous, and as necessary in our own time as it was in his. And yet we need to recognize that ecological thought is not simply an extension of Enlightenment values. Sometimes, as in the Hetch Hetchy fight, it involves a fundamental challenge to their conventional formulation—and particularly to the Enlightenment definition of progress.

V.

Human advance, from the Enlightenment standpoint, has always involved the drive toward systematic human control over the non-human world, through the transformation of nature into a manipulable object. Anti-modern critics from William Wordsworth to Wendell Berry have understood the deadening force of this process. Wordsworth's "we murder to dissect" summarized—succinctly if unsubtly—the romantic case against calculating analysis. But it was left to Max Weber to characterize the consequences of modernity with a formulation both sweeping and precise: what he called "rationalization," or the disenchantment of the world.

For centuries, disenchanters have been transforming the natural world—beavers and buffalo, meadows and streams—into commodities, robbing nature of its independent existence, its capacity to challenge us with its otherness. As James William Gibson writes, "There is power in a buffalo—spiritual, magic power—but there is no power in an Angus, or a Hereford." The powerlessness of commodities, Gibson thinks, arises from their reduced status as standardized, quantitative units of monetary value. This is a central assumption in the Weberian tradition.

The problem with it is that the process of rationalization is never complete: in modern consumer advertising, commodities (not to mention money itself) can be

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endowed with a shimmering aura, a magical promise of purchasable pleasure and possibly even self-transformation. The magic is not in the Angus, but in its associations with sizzling steaks or pastoral plenitude. Ignoring the faux-magic of consumer culture, Gibson assumes that we live in a spiritually deadened world. He has a point, though the situation is not as simple as he says it is.

In any case, he sees a counter-revolution under way. In *A Reenchanted World*, he catalogues the myriad signs of a widespread revolt against the dualist tradition of human dominion over nature, which provided the philosophical rationale for commodification. In his hopeful account, longings "to make nature sacred again" are everywhere in our culture, animating everything from such movies as *Whale Rider* and *Free Willy* to James Lovelock's Gaia Hypothesis (the earth is a living organism), the anthropologist Clifford Geertz's respect for "local knowledge" (the alternative to abstract knowledge), and the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan's exploration of "topophilia" (the attachment to a particular place). Unfortunately, the discourse of re-enchantment can sometimes sound like the old sentimental tropes. Among Plains Indians, Gibson writes, "hunted animals were sacred game, and meat-eating at the end of a successful hunt was a sacramental meal."

Yet finally this idea is not mere Noble Savagery. There is much historical and ethnographic evidence to corroborate it, without suggesting that Indian people were incapable of violence or waste. The uncomfortable fact remains (uncomfortable, at least, for doctrinaire modernizers) that the core of the re-enchanters' argument is not mere cant. The poet Gary Snyder puts the central issues in powerfully understated language: "where our civilization goes wrong is the mistaken belief that nature is something less than authentic, that nature is not as alive as man is, or as intelligent, that in a sense it is dead, and that animals are of so low an order of intelligence and feeling, we need not take their feelings into account."

Gibson elaborates on Snyder's ideas, but he is not an uncritical re-enchanter. He acknowledges the mistakes made in the name of re-connecting with nature—including those of Timothy Treadwell, who lived among the grizzly bears on Alaska's Gulf Coast and came to believe that he was "a fully accepted wild animal … brother to these bears," until one of them ate him. Treadwell allowed his sentimental attachment to bears to entice him across a crucial boundary between species. He lacked sufficient respect for the potential violence that is often inherent in a close relation with the wild.

Other disturbing conflicts sometimes surface in Gibson's survey, as when he reports the consequences of identity politics among the Makah of the Pacific Northwest. Some of their leaders insisted that their "cultural subsistence" required the revival of their sacred hunt for gray whales, which had just been removed from the endangered species list. Despite the protests of environmental activists, the Makah negotiated successfully with the International Whaling Commission and received permission to resume the hunt. Harpoons could not finish the job, so they resorted in the end to a rifle firing .50-caliber machine-gun bullets. Whether the reenactment of the hunt re-enchanted the spiritual world of the Makah, even faintly or fitfully, is an open question for people outside the tribe. But to this outsider, the incident suggests the pathos (tinged with absurdity) of many efforts to recapture lost traditions in an uncomprehending, disenchanted world. The task is more easily celebrated than accomplished. Sometimes the loss is permanent, and the tradition is better remembered than recovered.

Gibson's evidence for re-enchantment can be less than compelling. When a United Nations report in 2005 observes that "the true value of nature" is sometimes "difficult to put numbers on," and that "appreciation of the natural world is an important part of what makes us human," Gibson declares it "another text in the culture of enchantment" rather than what it is: a collection of bromides that threatens no one, a popgun pointed at established power. But on the whole Gibson keeps a firm grasp on his major theme—the restoration of a more egalitarian relationship between humans and the non-human world. He infers its importance from the hysteria of its detractors (Pat Robertson, for example, views the re-enchantment project as nothing less than the wedge of paganism) as well as from the catastrophic consequences of their policies. Under George W. Bush's Bureau of Land Management, Gibson observes, "the West was to be transformed into an industrial grid of wells, roads, and pipelines," while "mountaintop removal" and "valley fill" were to become standard practice in Appalachia.

Whether this sort of waste can be stopped by a change of administration remains to be seen. Gibson thinks that the Republican right's anti-environmental coalition began to come apart in 2006, and that the re-enchanters re-asserted themselves. They will have to confront the disabling impact of economic recession on environmental regulation—almost always seen as an enemy of "jobs"—as well as the old canard that they are hopeless romantics standing athwart the thrust of progress. That is where books such as Edward Humes's *Eco Barons* can be helpful. Written in the breezy style of celebrity journalism, the book is nevertheless well grounded in the local history of environmental controversy. And it gives environmental activists a makeover without trivializing their struggles.

Echoing the title of *The Robber Barons*, Matthew Josephson's classic account of Napoleonic financiers in the first Gilded Age, *Eco Barons* translates environmental activism into the idiom of business heroism. No longer knobby-kneed nerds in Birkenstocks, Humes's heroes are resourceful, shrewd, hip entrepreneurs. They include such countercultural capitalists as Douglas Tompkins, the founder of Esprit fashions, who has purchased and preserved huge tracts of temperate rain forest in southern Chile; and Roxanne Quimby, the queen of the Burt's Bees unguent empire, who has used her negotiating skills to build an odd coalition of vegetarians and hunters against development in the Maine woods.

The book's most provocative story centers around Andy Frank, an engineering professor at UC Davis who invented and patented the plug-in hybrid car. Humes accompanies his profile of Frank with a quick but revealing history of electric cars in America. The overall pattern boils down to this: the problems with electric cars have always been more political than technological. At various key moments in the electric car's history, the automobile and oil industries have intervened to block its development. The most recent occasion was in the late 1990s, when Toyota, Ford, and GM, faced with the California Air Resources Board's demand for a "zero-emission vehicle," produced workable battery-operated vehicles and even set up electric car divisions to market them. "One of the most curious episodes in automotive history unfolded next," writes Humes, "as car companies sought to undermine their own products."

They refused to sell the new cars. Instead they leased the vehicles "after a lengthy, intrusive application process." They spent next to nothing on advertising them. Despite mounting consumer demand, the companies produced only a few thousand electric cars, then began publicly criticizing their performance and shifting their focus to hydrogen fuel cell research—despite the objections of Frank

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and other scientists, who testified that the batteries were far more reliable and promising than hydrogen would likely ever be. Frank urged that the state substitute "very low emission vehicles" for "zero emissions vehicles," and that the industry turn to research in plug-in hybrids. GM hired him briefly to turn its battery-pack car into a hybrid, but then decided to kill the whole electric program, fired Frank, and turned to building Hummers. Other carmakers got on the SUV express, and electric cars piled up in junkyards.

Like Gibson, Humes thinks the political shift of 2006 represented a return to green thinking. Frank's designs have been rediscovered by local governments; Washington state wants a fleet of plug-in hybrids based on his model. Frank's company, Efficient Drivetrains, Inc., is much in demand, especially in Asia—but not in Detroit. The Detroit carmakers have developed plug-in hybrids, with specifications that fall short of Frank's. He questions the depth of their commitment, and presses on.

The history of electric cars is a green parable for our time. It raises subversive questions about roads not taken. It shows that, without adequate public backing, green entrepreneurs—no matter how shrewd—cannot successfully buck the corporate consensus. And above all it challenges the fundamental dogma of development, technological determinism. For decades if not centuries, critics of development have been told that the capitalist (and for a while, the socialist) version of progress is simply unstoppable—a neutral, inevitable, and beneficent process that is beyond politics and policy debate. For a moment, in the forgotten 1970s, this dogma came under scrutiny. But the cyber-revolution of the last thirty years revived it. Techno-determinists from Thomas Friedman to Bill Gates have repeatedly told us that we must choose to do what we have to do anyway—re-organize our lives in accordance with the dictates of technology. The rhetoric of inevitability conceals the business interests it serves, and negates the possibility of challenging them.

But the tale of the electric car decisively undercuts this determinist mythology. Humes's account reveals that technological progress is not the product of some irresistible demiurge called "modernity"; and that human beings have the capacity to direct technology rather than merely genuflect to its force; and that in fact the very definitions of progress can be challenged and changed by cranks who resist conventional wisdom. But only—it should be clear—if the cranks have a shot at some money and some power. ◆

Adam Kirsch

THE GREAT DISCONCERTING WIPEOUT

ARTHUR MILLER
By Christopher Bigsby
(Harvard University Press, 739 pp., $35)

I.

Arthur Miller could hardly have hoped for a more sympathetic biographer than Christopher Bigsby. He is the director of the Arthur Miller Centre for American Studies at the University of East Anglia, and the author of a long commentary on Miller's work and a book-length interview with the playwright. To write this biography, Miller granted Bigsby exclusive access to his papers, including unpublished manuscripts, and sat for what Bigsby describes as "many hours of interviews" over a twenty-five-year friendship.

So it is not surprising that the substance of Bigsby's book is wholly admiring of Miller, and takes his stature as a great American writer for granted. What is surprising is the peculiar form of the book, because it makes a rather severe judgment. Bigsby spends 650 pages narrating Miller's life and times, from his birth in 1915 to 1961, the year he divorced Marilyn Monroe. The last forty-four years of Miller's life are covered in the remaining twenty-five pages of the book, almost all of them dealing with his courtship of Inge Morath, who became his third wife in 1962. This would make sense if Bigsby's book, enormous as it is, were merely the first of a two-volume biography. But while the book's title page includes the subtitle "1915–1962," the years do not appear on the cover, and there is no suggestion that Bigsby is working on a sequel. It is as though Miller's life effectively ended when he was forty-seven years old. In Bigsby's hands, its entire second half was a superfluous coda.

If this is Bigsby's implied judgment, it seems also to have been Miller's. *Timebends*, the entertaining and voluble autobiography that Miller published in 1987, also effectively cuts off in the early 1960s, with only a few episodes from the later years that saw Miller flourish as the president of PEN and an elder statesman of American letters. He has little to say even about the many plays that he continued to write and stage in those years, and he confesses that the 1960s marked a rupture in his creative life: "It was no good simply saying the past was canceled. But why did it seem to have no particular connection with the present and who I was now? Cancellation was the beginning of the sixties for me, the great disconcerting wipeout of all that had gone before."

This sudden cancellation—the abrupt expulsion of Arthur Miller from the living heart of the American theater to the more serene eminence of the textbook and the anthology—is the real mystery of his life. Bigsby's biography brings home to the reader just how brief Miller's period as a major playwright really was. His reputation rests primarily on four plays—*All My Sons*, *Death of a Salesman*, *The Crucible*, *A View From the Bridge*—that debuted between 1947 and 1955. And even that span might be misleadingly broad, since *A View From the Bridge*, first produced as a one-act in 1955, grew out of a story Miller had been pondering since the late 1940s, and had already treated in a screenplay, never produced, called *The Hook*. So if you date the end of his most fertile period to the writing of *The Crucible* in 1952, you find just five or six years of greatness, preceded by a decade of apprenticeship and followed by more than fifty years of respectability.

"There is never a moment when an Arthur Miller play is not being staged somewhere in the world," Bigsby claims on the last page of the book; but that play is not *The Creation of the World and Other Business* or *The American Clock* or *Broken Glass*. Bigsby does not offer a new solution to the problem of Miller's career. Rather, his biography annotates, at length, the explanation that Miller himself provided—directly in *Timebends* and his autobiographical play *After the Fall*, indirectly in other late works from *The Price* to *The Ride Down Mount Morgan*. Melodramatic as it sounds, it seems to be true that his marriage to Marilyn Monroe, which lasted from 1956 to 1960, was what broke the spring of his imagination.

Before Monroe, Miller wrote out of the conviction—necessary to all great writers, perhaps, but especially to playwrights—that his private experience was representative of the public's experience. When *All My Sons*, his second play to be

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produced on Broadway, was a smash hit in 1947—the first, *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, had closed after three days in 1944—Miller became convinced that "some kind of public business was happening inside me, that what perplexed or moved me must move others. It was a sort of blessing I invented for myself."

All My Sons ran for 328 performances. His next play, *Death of a Salesman*, ran for 742, amply justifying Miller's sense of being in tune with the times. On *Salesman*'s opening night, February 10, 1949, Irene Mayer Selznick, one of the show's producers, sent Miller a telegram: "TONIGHT AT EIGHT AND THEN THE WORLD IS YOURS." "Her Hollywood background may have been showing through," Bigsby comments, "but she was far from wrong." Box office was assured when Brooks Atkinson, the influential theater critic of *The New York Times*, gave the play a rave review: "masterly," "heroic," "superb." (A friend of Miller's read him the review over the phone as Atkinson typed it, in a scene that itself reads like something out of a play.) The Pulitzer Prize and the Tony followed, as well as less conventional honors, which showed how deeply Miller had touched the American public. The National Council of Salesman's Organizations named him an "outstanding spokesman for the selling profession," which was rather as if the American Legion had given an award to *Johnny Got His Gun*.

It would hardly have been possible for Miller to score a bigger success than *Death of a Salesman*, and the plays that followed—*The Crucible* in 1953 and *A View From the Bridge*, on a bill with another one-act, *A Memory of Two Mondays*, in 1955—had shorter, though still respectable runs. But in 1956, Miller divorced his first wife, Mary Slattery, and married Marilyn Monroe, whom he had met in 1951, when he went to Hollywood with Elia Kazan to try to interest a studio in *The Hook*. For the next seven years, Miller wrote no new plays. The only substantial work he did during his marriage to Monroe was the screenplay for *The Misfits*, designed as a vehicle for his wife, and unsettlingly proficient in the Hollywood conventions that he had previously scorned.

The next play Miller brought to the stage was *After the Fall*, in 1964—three years after his divorce from Monroe, and just a year and a half after her death by drug overdose. This only heightened the scandal of the play, which was a nakedly autobiographical treatment of Miller's divorce from Mary, his troubled romance with Monroe—named Maggie in the play, and transformed from a movie star to a singer—and his redemption through the love of Holga, as he called his third wife, Inge Morath. Robert Brustein, never a fan of Miller's, described the play in these pages as "the kind of document that playwrights publish posthumously, if at all, since it implicates so many people living, and so many recently dead."

Today, when the participants in Miller's private drama are gone, and we are more used to this kind of literary confession, *After the Fall* does not seem so troubling. A passionately self-justifying play, at once moving and frustrating, it belongs with Robert Lowell's *The Dolphin* and the Zuckerman novels of Philip Roth in the literature of male mid-life crisis. But in 1964 it seemed that the "blessing" Miller once enjoyed had been withdrawn, and indeed reversed: where once he had transacted the public's business in the privacy of his art, now he was exposing his private life in public. He had been transformed from an artist into a celebrity, and he never quite recovered.

The sheer improbability of the marriage between Miller and Monroe was one reason why it attracted so much attention: the egghead and the airhead, New York and Hollywood in human form. Perhaps recognizing what a romance with Monroe would involve, Miller denied the attraction that he felt at their first meeting, until four more years in his unhappy marriage left him ready to succumb to Monroe's near-idolatry. Immediately, he began to pay the price for his newfound, unwanted fame, which made his old prestige as a playwright seem like positive obscurity.

Even before Miller and Monroe were officially engaged, while Miller was still waiting out his Reno divorce, he found himself subpoenaed by HUAC. The timing was not coincidental: as Bigsby notes, by 1956 the Committee's influence was on the wane, and Miller's connection with America's biggest sex symbol made him a witness guaranteed to draw attention. Bigsby repeats the well-known story that the HUAC chairman, Francis Walter, offered to cancel the subpoena if Monroe would pose for a photo with him. (Miller told this story with relish, but it would be nice to have it confirmed by someone else. As Bigsby points out, several episodes in Miller's memoirs are contradicted by other witnesses or evidence.)

Miller refused, and appeared before a not entirely hostile committee. One congressman asked him why he didn't direct "some of that magnificent ability you have to fighting against well-known Communist subversive conspiracies in our country and the world." Nor was Miller openly confrontational, as Paul Robeson had been the week before. He was happy to declare, "I think it would be a disaster and a calamity if the Communist Party ever took over this country." But his refusal to name names earned him a contempt citation, which was eventually overturned on appeal.

No sooner was Miller done testifying than he went back to Roxbury, Connecticut, where he lived for much of his adult life, to marry Monroe. On the day of the wedding, June 29, the couple planned to give a press conference, hoping to sate the huge appetite for stories about what one columnist called "America's foremost foremosts." On the way home from picking up the marriage license, Miller and Monroe witnessed a car crash: a reporter from *Paris Match*, following their car, had run into a tree, and the bride and groom watched her die on the roadside. They then continued home, where the assembled reporters went ahead with the press conference. It was an omen of the life to come. As Bigsby puts it, "Miller was being ushered into a new moral universe."

Then it was off to England, where Monroe was to star with Laurence Olivier in a light comedy called *The Prince and the Showgirl*. Here the private misery began, as Miller began to fathom Monroe's bottomless insecurity and paranoia. Certain that the great Olivier held her in contempt, Monroe responded by sabotaging the picture—taking sleeping pills, showing up late, refusing to learn her lines. One scene required thirty takes, "which Olivier called 'an historic amount.'" When Miller tried to point out, reasonably, that Olivier was not really out to get her, Monroe reacted as though her husband had joined the conspiracy against her. The only person she trusted, Miller discovered, was Paula Strasberg, her acting guru, who fed her delusions endlessly. On one occasion, Miller remembered, Strasberg told Marilyn: "You are the greatest woman of your time, the greatest human being of your time; of any time, you name it; you can't think of anybody, I mean—no, not even Jesus—except you're more popular." (John Lennon at least had a sense of humor about it.)

Within months, Miller told Bigsby, he grasped that the marriage had been a mistake. By 1960, when Miller was on the set of *The Misfits*, he and Monroe were openly at war. It was especially bitter because the movie had been Miller's love offering, written for Monroe in the wake of a traumatic miscarriage. In the romance between the young, guileless,

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vulnerable Roslyn, Monroe's character, and the older, tougher Gay Langland—Miller's surrogate, played in the film by Clark Gable—the playwright imagined a happy ending that life could not provide. Bigsby quotes Montgomery Clift, who played a younger rival for Monroe's affection in *The Misfits*, arguing that his character should logically have ended up with Roslyn. But "Arthur was doing some wish-fulfillment. He identified with the character played by Gable. Arthur wanted him to keep Marilyn because he wants her to himself. But this marriage is over, and he might as well face it." By the time *The Misfits* premiered, early in 1961, they had split up.

II.

For another kind of writer, life with Marilyn Monroe, however trying, might not have been so imaginatively damaging. But for Miller, the decision to divorce his wife of fifteen years, the mother of his two children, and marry one of the world's most beautiful women was more than just a personal one. It meant publicly embracing fame and fortune, in the most literal sense; and it as much as implied that Monroe was Miller's reward for his plays. Yet for his entire adult life—ever since he came to political and artistic consciousness, in the trough of the Depression—Miller had been powerfully suspicious of the very idea of success. It is no accident that his greatest creation was the great failure Willy Loman, who acquiesces in every article of the American Dream—he wants to be rich, successful, "well-liked"—and ends up a suicide.

Bigsby shows that Miller knew about such failure at first hand. His father, Isidore Miller, was in some ways an even more dramatic example than Willy Loman, since he had actually known success and then suddenly lost it. Isidore came to America from Poland in 1890, at the age of six; his parents and older siblings had gone on ahead, leaving him to cross Europe and the Atlantic alone. Bigsby cites Miller speculating, late in life, that his father had been considered mentally defective, which would explain why he was initially left behind, and why he was never taught to read or write. (Though Bigsby tactfully avoids mentioning it, this speculation may reflect Miller's own guilt over his son Daniel, born with Down syndrome in 1967, whom he consigned to an institution and never talked about.)

But Isidore turned out to be the best businessman in the Miller family. He quickly graduated from sewing clothes in a Broome Street sweatshop to selling coats for the family firm, travelling across the country at the age of fifteen. After World War I he struck out on his own, and his Miltex Coat and Suit Company flourished in the 1920s. Family legend had it that in 1915, William Fox, a garment-business associate of Isidore's, asked him for a $50,000 loan to help him start a movie studio in Hollywood. Isidore turned him down, and so missed out on becoming an owner of Twentieth Century Fox (which, coincidentally, became Marilyn Monroe's studio).

Until Arthur Miller was thirteen, he lived with his parents, his older brother, and his younger sister in a grand apartment in Jewish Harlem, with a view over Central Park down to the Battery. Every morning, chauffeur-driven cars would pick up Isidore and the other businessmen in the building. Miller's mother, Augusta, had intellectual and artistic leanings, and was frustrated at having been married off to an illiterate man. But it was not until the money disappeared, in the crash of 1929, that the elder Millers' marriage was exposed as a loveless business arrangement, a merger that now failed. In *After the Fall*, Miller recreates the traumatic scenes that took place when Augusta learned that her husband had lost all their money in the stock market: "You mean you saw everything going down and you throw good money after bad? Are you some kind of a moron? I should have run the day I met you!" Despite repeated efforts, Isidore would never be prosperous again.

At the age of fourteen, then, Arthur Miller was expelled from the upper middle class to the lower middle class, and from Harlem to the Midwood area of Brooklyn, where the family moved into a small house on East 3rd Street. When he graduated high school, where he was a poor student, he took a job filling orders at an auto-parts warehouse; it took him two years to save the $500 needed to enroll at the University of Michigan. It is no wonder that the Depression, which ruined his family in the most intimate ways, turned Miller, like so many Jews of his generation, into a radical and a Communist sympathizer—though never, he insisted, a party member. One reason it took HUAC so long to subpoena Miller was that even the committee's investigators could not find a party card with Miller's name on it.

In fact, unlike the young New York intellectuals who spent the 1930s poring over Marx and Engels at City College, Miller was never very interested in Marxism as a theory. The radicals at Michigan were not that sophisticated, as Miller recalled in a late interview: "I'll never forget, there was a professor of economics who at one point asked, 'Who has read volume two of *Das Kapital*?' Somebody stuck his hand up and said, 'There isn't one.' I'm sure nobody read it. It was just taken as an article of faith that we understood what this was all about." What made him a fellow traveler was, rather, the shock of the Depression, the rise of fascism in Europe, and a completely uninformed admiration of the Soviet Union, which seemed the only home of social hope. It was because Miller's communism was so emotional, so uncompromised by either theory or practice, that he could remain a vocal fellow traveler into the 1950s, even after he acknowledged the truth about Stalinism and the Soviet Union. As Bigsby remarks, "he would never accept that the feelings that inspired his radical commitments were ever invalidated. What was his faith if not a conviction that we are responsible for our own actions and the state of our society?"

Miller's politics were irresponsible, but they fertilized his artistic imagination. From the moment he started writing plays, as a student at Michigan, his goal as an artist was to redeem the world. "In a word," as he wrote in one essay, "there lies within the dramatic form the ultimate possibility of raising the truth-consciousness of mankind to such a level of intensity as to transform those who observe it." But this required solidarity with the world's oppressed—with the poor, with persecuted leftists, with his bankrupt father—as well as a puritanical scorn of those who "made it." It was his fascination with failure, and with the virtue of failure, that allowed Miller to create Willy Loman, and to make the audience love Willy more the more futile and pathetic he becomes.

Starting with *All My Sons*, however, Miller suffered from the paradox that his plays about failure were making him rich and famous. "I had been scratching on the glass from the outside for thirty-one years," he writes in *Timebends*, "until now I was scratching on it from the inside, trying to keep contact with the ordinary life from which my work had grown. For the slow dread was descending on me that I might have nothing more to say as a writer." To atone for his success and avert the punishment of silence, Miller imposed penances on himself. When *All My Sons* starting

ANTHONY RUSSO

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bringing him $2,000 per week, he took a job assembling beer-box dividers at a factory in Long Island City for forty cents an hour. He only lasted a few days—Miller was no Simone Weil, and could not blink the absurdity of the gesture—but the sense of guilt remained.

Death of a Salesman opened in February 1949, and the next month Miller momentously agreed to chair a panel at the Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace—the infamous "Waldorf Conference," sponsored by the Soviet Union, which became a flashpoint in the cultural cold war. The low points of that event—to which Bigsby devotes an insightful chapter—included the humiliation of Dmitri Shostakovich, who was compelled to read a statement denouncing "bourgeois formalism" and apologizing for his music's failure "to meet with approval among the broad masses of listeners." At another session Dwight Macdonald, one of a number of anti-Stalinists who infiltrated the conference, read off a list of names of vanished Soviet writers, asking Aleksandr Fadeyev, the head of the Union of Soviet Writers, to account for their whereabouts. Fadeyev responded with details about where each writer was living and what they were currently working on. It later emerged that "all those of whom Fadeyev had spoken were either already dead from torture or firing squad, or were in prison, to die later."

As Bigsby notes, a photograph from the conference shows Miller posing alongside Shostakovich and Fadeyev. His participation was a disgrace. It was also a danger, bringing him once again to the attention of HUAC and the FBI, and landing him in a *Life* photo spread headlined "Dupes and Fellow Travelers," along with Charlie Chaplin and Langston Hughes. But for Miller it was a necessary act of contrition. "I might not have agreed to chair one of the panels," he wrote in *Timebends*, "had *Salesman* not continued to be such a universally acclaimed success. I simply felt better with one foot outside the standard show business world, and once invited, I could not refuse."

Miller drives the point home with one of the most telling anecdotes in his memoir. Among the speakers at the Waldorf-Astoria was Clifford Odets, who in the 1930s had shot to fame as a "stormbird of the revolution," the author of stirring radical plays such as *Waiting for Lefty* and *Awake and Sing*. But Odets, notoriously, had gone Hollywood, trading the stage and the revolution for the screen and a fat studio contract. By 1949, his best days were long behind him. It was a terrible irony, then, when Odets got up at the Waldorf and demanded, "Why is there this threat of war?"

> The question hung in silence, and the audience pressed forward, straining to hear his voice. Now, slowly, his hand rose above his head and his fist closed, and at the raging top of his voice he yelled, "MONEEY!"
>
> Astonishment. A few grins breaking out. But on the whole his inner urgency was having an effect.
>
> There was another pause, and again a series of questions demanding the source of our danger, and once more the scream: "MONEEEY!"
>
> Four or five repetitions had the audience tittering, and even worse was Odets's apparent unawareness that he was stepping over the edge into the ridiculous. I sat there thinking unjust thoughts: what had he been doing in Hollywood but wasting his time making money?… Why were there so few Americans so far beyond corruption that their voices were undeniable by any honest person?

The spectacle of Odets's self-betrayal, coming at the very moment when Miller himself was rocketing to heights that even Odets had never known, was a fearful warning. For it was Odets's plays, which Miller saw in their legendary Group Theatre productions in the 1930s, that ignited Miller's calling as a writer. Strangely for a professional playwright, he claimed to "have never loved the brick and mortar of the theater.… The sole sense of connection with theater came when I saw the productions of the Group Theatre." Hearing the cry of "Strike! Strike!" taken up by the audience at the end of *Waiting for Lefty*, Miller thought he could recognize "the Greek situation when religion and belief were the heart of drama." From Odets, Miller took the conviction that "writing had to try to save America, and that meant grabbing people and shaking them by the back of the neck."

III.

This, of course, has always been the standard criticism of Miller's plays: that they amount to left-liberal sermons, with the playwright always shoving the audience toward the desired social and political conclusions. For Eric Bentley, Miller was "the playwright of American liberal folklore." Robert Brustein, reviewing *A View From the Bridge*, found "melodramatic preachment," "truth—life in its concreteness … obscured by a fog of false rhetoric." It is, in fact, all too easy to reduce Miller's major plays to their messages—to say that *All My Sons* is about war profiteering, *Death of a Salesman* about the false values of capitalism, *The Crucible* about McCarthyism, *A View From the Bridge* about the evil of informing. That is why these plays are so amenable to the high school classroom—Bentley ruefully noted that textbooks already used the rubric "From Aeschylus to Arthur Miller"—and why they are so easy for more experienced theatergoers to disdain.

One of the most useful services that Bigsby performs for Miller is to show the difference between Miller's major plays and simple agitprop. He does not do so directly, but rather by digging up the unproduced plays and radio scripts that Miller was writing between 1938, when he graduated from the University of Michigan and returned to New York, and the end of the war. These really were left-wing propaganda pieces, sentimental and condescending, and Miller passes over them in silence in *Timebends.* It is easy to see why, reading lines like these from *Jobs for Tomorrow*, a radio series sponsored by the CIO, for which Miller wrote about shipbuilders: "One thing that's come out of the war is this—a lot of bosses are learning that the man on the job has got eyes and ears to see and hear what's wrong. And if he's got an organization—a union—to come to he can improve things."

Ironically, in *Timebends*, Miller writes in a very different spirit about his own experience working at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, where he signed on in 1942 after his draft board classified him 4-F, on account of a childhood sports injury. In reality, Miller recalled, the workers at the yard were mostly dishonest and incompetent: "Whenever a drydock was finally flooded and a ship instead of sinking floated safely into the harbor and sailed out into the bay, I was not the only one who stared at it thinking it miraculous that out of our chaos and incompetence, our bumbling and goofing off and our thefts and our dedicated moments in the wind, we had managed to repair it." Once, Miller recalls, a notice was put up reminding the workers not to waste cadmium, a scarce rustproof metal. Immediately the men began stealing as much cadmium as they could get their hands on, turning it into rings and bracelets for their wives.

The workers Miller saw at the Navy Yard, or at his post-high-school job at an auto-parts warehouse (later memorialized in *A Memory of Two Mondays),*

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were not the brave, simple, loyal men whom Odets depicted. Most troublingly for Miller, they were often openly anti-Semitic. In *Waiting for Lefty*, Odets devotes one sketch to the plight of a young doctor who is denied promotion because he is Jewish. In his production notes on the play, Odets suggests that "a voice might announce at the appropriate moments in [this] scene that the USSR is the only country in the world where anti-Semitism is a crime against the State." Many Jews were communists or fellow-travelers for exactly this reason.

But how could a workers' state be safe for Jews when the workers at the warehouse were so hostile to Miller, the first Jew ever to be employed there? Or when Mikush, the gruff superintendent of his family's apartment building, appeared to the Jews who lived there as a "mythic enemy"? "Had we lived in Germany, Mikush would likely have been the Nazi representative in the building," Miller observes in his memoir, and Bigsby shows that Miller's sensitivity to anti-Semitism was acute until the end of his life. In 2001, after reading *Constantine's Sword*, James Carroll's fine book about the history of Catholic anti-Semitism, Miller mordantly told his biographer that "I've decided to give up being Jewish so I can sleep better at night."

This is remarkable, coming from a man who had been so beloved, and so iconically American, for so long. It is also notable as a response to the critics who reproached Miller for not writing more explicitly as a Jew, especially in *Death of a Salesman*, where the Lomans are almost but not quite Jewish. Mary McCarthy complained that Willy Loman "could not be Jewish because he had to be 'America.'" Leslie Fiedler wrote that Miller, like Paddy Chayefsky, created "crypto-Jewish characters; characters who are in habit, speech, and condition of life typically Jewish, but are presented as something else." In an interview in 1969, Miller insisted that he was happy to make a character explicitly Jewish when it was thematically necessary—for instance, in *Incident at Vichy*—but in Willy's case his "religious or cultural background" was "irrelevant."

This approach to identity is not very fashionable today, when we are inclined to see universalism as a species of false consciousness. And in fact, Bigsby demonstrates, Miller's real feelings about Jewishness as a literary subject were more complicated. He quotes a speech that Miller delivered to a Jewish organization in 1947, in which he insisted that he had "graduated out of … Jewish life," that "the Jewish writer [had] no other identity than his American identity." Yet he went on to say that "to face away from Jewish life when one has a story to tell is not to be more universal and less parochial; it is to refuse to do best what no one else can do at all"—which is just what Fiedler, in particular, accused Miller of not believing.

To make sense of this confusion or contradiction in Miller's approach to Jewish subjects, it is necessary to remember how intensely vulnerable Miller felt the Jews to be in Depression and wartime America. As he said in the same speech, "I have been insulted, I have been scorned, I have been threatened, I have heard of violence against Jews, and I have seen it … when I confront the prospect of writing about Jewish life my mood is defensive, and combative." Yet Miller was not merely defensive. He believed that his writing somehow had to heal the breach between Jew and Gentile, as also between rich and poor. In *Timebends*, he went so far as to put this impulse at the center of his writing: "By whatever means, I had somehow arrived at the psychological role of mediator between the Jews and America, and among Americans themselves as well." He even suggested that, if hoped for big audiences, it was not because he wanted money or fame, but because he wanted to save the Jews: "should I ever win an audience it would have to be made up of all the people, not merely the educated or sophisticated, since it was this mass that contained the oceanic power to smash everything, including myself, or to create much good."

This fear and this hope were the motives for Miller's first notable work, which appeared before he had made any mark on Broadway—his novel *Focus*, which was published in 1945. It was part of the first wave of post-Holocaust books to address anti-Semitism in America, along with *Gentlemen's Agreement* and *The Victim*. The premise of *Focus* makes its "mediating" purpose clear: it is the story of an anti-Semite, Lawrence Newman, who finds that putting on his new glasses makes him look Jewish. Forced to experience life as a Jew, Newman can no longer justify his own hatred of Jews, especially once he becomes a target of the Christian Front, a vigilante group that Miller suggests is planning an American Holocaust: "You know as well as me that everybody, pretty near, has no use for the Jews. That's true, isn't it? All right. A depression comes along, and you know as well as me that it's coming … and it's the end of the Hebrews."

The author of *Focus* could hardly be accused of downplaying his Jewish identity. Yet there was a good deal of merit in Fiedler's complaint that, as Bigsby writes, "the tactic of making Newman a gentile derived from Miller's conviction that while Jew-baiting was real, Jews were imaginary, just as he would suggest of *The Crucible* that witch-hunting was real but witches not." Bigsby notes the parallel with Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew*, which appeared in 1946. Like Sartre, Miller suggested in *Focus* that Jewish identity is nothing more than the product of persecution—that the Jew is constituted by the anti-Semite, so that a non-Jew becomes Jewish as soon as he is treated like a Jew. Take away anti-Semitism and the Jew will disappear. It is a false analysis, of course; but Miller's view of the Jew was of a piece with the image of the Jew as a hero of alienation that was so prevalent in the postwar years. Bigsby's book does not extend to the period of *Incident at Vichy*, which premiered at the end of 1964, but there, too, Miller writes that "Jew is only the name we give to that stranger, that agony we cannot feel, that death we look at like a cold abstraction. Each man has his Jew; it is the other." This thin description of Jewishness is part of what makes the play historically unconvincing: all the Jews awaiting deportation bear standard French names (Leduc, Lebeau), whereas the actual first victims of Vichy anti-Semitism were German and Polish immigrants, who were quite distinguishable from Frenchmen in their names, their appearances, and their personal histories.

On the subject of Jews, as on the subject of communism, Miller's ideas suffered from precisely the lack of critical rigor, the credulous readiness to take intention for reality, that the anti-Stalinists in New York decried. Bigsby dwells rather darkly on the criticism that Miller received from such corners: "In the early 1970s, the critic Malcolm Cowley warned him that the Trotskyites had been plotting against him from the beginning and, looking back from 2001, Miller regarded the attacks launched on him by this group … as being of crucial importance … it seemed to him that they had been instrumental in shaping the reception of his plays in the United States." To which one can only reply that, if *Partisan Review* was out to stop Miller's rise, it did not do a very good job. In 1949, more people saw *Death of a Salesman* in a month than read *Partisan Review* in a year.

Still, it cannot be a coincidence that it was in the late 1940s and early 1950s,

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exactly when Miller's Popular Front views were under the strongest pressure, that he produced his best work. Earlier, when Miller could luxuriate in the group- and Group-think of the left, his writing was too blunt and simplistic. Afterward, when he had been through the Monroe whirlwind, and when the radicalism of the 1930s was superseded by the radicalism of the 1960s, he was bewildered, and could only look inward and backward for subject matter. But from 1946 to 1955, he was energized by the difficulty of using the theater to save a country that evidently did not want saving, at least not his way.

Thus, as wartime collectivism gave way to postwar selfishness, Miller produced *All My Sons*, about an airplane manufacturer who sells defective parts to the military, defending himself on the grounds that "a man can't be a Jesus in this world!" Just in time for what Robert Lowell called "the tranquillized Fifties," Miller wrote *Death of a Salesman*, in which cars and refrigerators and mortgages become nooses for a man's soul. As HUAC turned former radicals such as Elia Kazan and Clifford Odets into compliant witnesses, Miller used *The Crucible* to defend the virtues of loyalty, honor, and sanity in the face of moral panic. In each case, Miller allowed the full weight of history to test what he called "the weld between my personal ambition as a playwright and my hopes for the salvation of the Republic." That imagined connection, at once noble and delusive, was what allowed Miller to write such moving plays—until his life and times severed it, by forcing him to recognize that even that the best-intentioned art cannot bring redemption. ◆

G.W. Bowersock
UNQUIET FLOWS THE DON

MAURICE BOWRA: A LIFE
By Leslie Mitchell
(Oxford University Press, 385 pp., $50)

As warden of Wadham College in Oxford, president of the British Academy, the author of well-known books on ancient Greek literature, and a conversationalist of legendary brilliance, Maurice Bowra seemed, in the middle of the last century, the very embodiment of Oxford life. Enjoying a huge international reputation as a scholar, a wit, and an administrator, he was duly elected into prestigious academies and awarded honorary degrees in both Europe and America. George VI knighted him in 1951. Yet few who were not alive at that time know his name today. For those of the younger generation who are aware of him at all, his career conjures up the Oxford of *Brideshead Revisited*, and it has been said that he was the model for Mr. Samgrass. A few of his bright remarks linger on among the chattering classes: "Buggers can't be choosers," or "Where there's death there's hope," or "He is a man who has no public virtues and no private parts." But for the most part Bowra has sunk into oblivion, to emerge from time to time in an obituary or in the voluminous correspondence of Isaiah Berlin.

Wadham College, which Bowra led from 1938 until 1970 and elevated from a long tradition of mediocrity into one of glittering prominence, commissioned this biography by Leslie Mitchell, an "old boy" of Wadham and a historian of modern England and France. Mitchell knew his subject personally, and he has had access to the archives of many of the notable figures with whom Bowra was in contact. He has a deep sympathy for the contradictions and the anxieties that drove Bowra to almost frenetic activity in Oxford, but unfortunately he has no comprehension of ancient Greek culture or the world of classical scholars, whose rejection drove Bowra into university administration in the first place and then consigned his publications to the trash heap soon after his death. Once he was dead, the verbal assaults that Bowra hurled at his detractors came no more.

Bowra's incandescent talk was admired wherever he went, and he never failed to deliver. In commemorating him for *The Times*, Isaiah Berlin wrote that "his wit was verbal and cumulative: the words came in short, sharp bursts of precisely aimed, concentrated fire, as image, pun, metaphor, parody, seemed spontaneously to generate one another in a succession of marvelously imagined patterns, sometimes rising to high, wildly comical fantasy." Anyone who has ever listened to Berlin himself cannot but think that he is describing his own way of talking, and yet the description of Bowra's wit is right on target. Bowra and Berlin were old friends, and the peculiarly dazzling logorrhea that characterized both of them doubtless arose from decades of conversation together.

Bowra was born in 1898 in China, where his father worked in the Chinese customs service, but he soon came back to England and was given an impeccable classical education at Cheltenham. Although his exotic origins may have encouraged a lifelong interest in foreign literatures, Bowra was irreproachably British in background and manner, and for someone like Isaiah Berlin, born of a Jewish family in Riga and arriving in Oxford by way of St. Petersburg, he must have provided a seductive model of sophistication. Berlin saw Bowra as "a major liberating influence," and many years later, in a letter in the summer of 1952, he poured out his gratitude to the warden of Wadham with perhaps excessive self-deprecation: "As you know, I take a low view of myself and all I do and friendship means more to me—and always has—than anything else at all.... It is not merely love and admiration for you that I feel, though these emotions are genuine enough; but I owe you a transformation of my entire mode of life and attitude towards it. It is a trite way of putting it perhaps, but you did 'liberate' me.... I do not for a moment suppose that you were aware of the strength and emancipating power of your mere presence, but if I am anything to anybody the ... responsibility is largely yours." (The full text of this letter has now been published in *Enlightening: Letters 1946–1960*, the delightful second volume of Berlin's correspondence, skillfully edited by Henry Hardy and Jennifer Holmes.) Even John Sparrow, the warden of All Souls College, whom Bowra often annoyed mightily, wrote affectingly in verse: "You made us what we are; / Our jokes, our joys, our hopes, our hatreds too, / The outrageous things we do, or want to do— / How much of all of them we owe to you!" The liberating force of Bowra must have been real, although I never felt it myself on the few occasions when I met him towards the end of his life.

For anyone bright enough to respond to the challenges of Bowra's manner, he was clearly charismatic, and in the 1920s and early 1930s he surrounded himself with young admirers, who always ran the risk of banishment from the charmed circle. Among his undergrad-

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uate guests were Kenneth Clark, John Betjeman, Hugh Gaitskill, Evelyn Waugh, and Cecil Day-Lewis. Both Isaiah Berlin and John Sparrow survived and profited from this quite literally intoxicating society. Mitchell reveals very clearly that the pied-piper aspect of Bowra itself sprang from deep fears of rejection and failure, and he tells, as Berlin himself did at the memorial service in 1971, that H. W. B. Joseph, a demanding philosopher to whom the young Bowra was assigned for tutorials at New College, nearly destroyed his pupil's confidence by constantly challenging and mocking his assertions. It was only by dropping philosophy at this stage that Bowra managed to recover his equilibrium and go on to a successful undergraduate career in classics. But the sense of inadequacy and failure never left him—and in a notorious episode in 1936, it changed the entire course of his life.

Gilbert Murray, whose name among English-speakers was synonymous with Greek literature in the early twentieth century, was about to retire from the Regius Professorship of Greek at Oxford. He had taught the young Bowra and apparently led him to believe that he might well become his successor in the distinguished post. But to the surprise of almost everyone, Bowra himself above all, the electors to the chair chose E. R. Dodds, an Irish scholar of Neoplatonic philosophy. This was someone completely outside the circle of Oxford academics in which Bowra had already found a niche, and his friends could only assume that Murray had dropped his support of Bowra. The outcome of the election was devastating. Bowra promptly went off to be a visiting professor in America, where he was offered a chair at Harvard. But, Oxonian to the core, he returned and decided instead to accept the wardenship of Wadham as a new vocation in the absence of a chair of Greek.

This episode was absolutely crucial in determining Bowra's future career. It left him with a feeling, which Joseph had first instilled in him, of being second-rate—a feeling that impelled him to prove himself over and over again in a series of books on Greek as well as modern literature. What happened in the summer of 1936 can only be explained by reference to the state of classical scholarship at the time. In the previous year Bowra had published a critical edition of the poems of Pindar in the highly esteemed series of Oxford Classical Texts, and this was obviously meant to be the major scholarly work that would ensure his elevation to the Regius Chair.

Unfortunately, his edition of Pindar had the opposite effect. A review of Bowra's book appeared in the distinguished German periodical *Gnomon*, which all professional classicists consulted with respect. One of the journal's founders, Eduard Fraenkel, had recently arrived in Oxford as a Jewish refugee from Germany, and he may well have had early warning of the review of Bowra's Pindar that was about to appear; but it would certainly have been available in print before the electors met in 1936. Murray must have seen it, and Bowra, who read German with facility, would have seen it too.

The reviewer, Alexander Turyn (then in Warsaw), found the text of the poems marginally acceptable because it simply reproduced another scholar's published text, but he pronounced Bowra's own scholarship "completely worthless" (*vollkommen wertlos*). And this review must have been read also by Arthur Darby Nock at Harvard, to whom Murray had written for an opinion about his successor. Nock told me explicitly in 1962 that he had written against the election of Bowra and had put forward the name of Dodds, whose scholarship he had known through his own work on late antique philosophy. In his autobiography, Bowra's cool reference to Nock during his brief stay at Harvard in late 1936 suggests to me that he had some knowledge of what had gone on behind the scenes.

Curiously, the choice of Dodds as professor proved to be an inspired one. His great book *The Greeks and the Irrational* is, without question, one of the masterpieces of classical learning in the twentieth century, and his edition of Euripides's *Bacchae* reigns supreme even now. No less curiously, the bitter disappointment that drove Bowra into the wardenship of Wadham proved to be the making of the Bowra who acquired such renown in postwar Oxford. The electors to the Regius Chair achieved far more than they imagined.

Bowra never again attempted to do a critical edition of a Greek author. In a memorial that appeared in the *Proceedings of the British Academy*, Dodds's successor in the Regius Chair, Hugh Lloyd-Jones, wrote candidly that "Bowra was not suited to be a textual critic. He lacked the accuracy and caution expected of an editor, and he had been denied the gift of textual divination.... His Oxford text of Pindar (1935), though its *apparatus criticus* contains some useful matter, has not enough positive merits to compensate for its numerous inaccuracies." After becoming warden of Wadham, Bowra devoted himself entirely to expository books about literature, apart from his autobiographical *Memories*, which he strangely refused to carry beyond the 1930s.

The published oeuvre remains something of a mystery to this day, because it is uniformly so dull. Anyone with a knowledge of Bowra's conversation and wit, and of the poetic parodies that lacerated the reputations of his contemporaries, will find it difficult to imagine why his academic prose was so utterly undistinguished. As Lloyd-Jones remarked, "Those who knew only Bowra's writings may find it hard to understand, but no person who knew him at all well can fail to be surprised that nothing that he ever wrote gives the faintest inkling of the impression which he made in conversation.... Even where he avoids cliché, what he wrote seems flat and pedestrian beside the brilliance of what he said. To this deficiency of style corresponds a deficiency of content." I think that the reason for this bizarre situation is that Bowra at his best was pure artifice, whereas scholarship was—and is—not. His coruscating brilliance in speech, his puns and put-downs, were simply not enough for serious work. Unlike A. E. Housman, he was incapable of uniting wit with scholarship, and Housman could do so only in print.

It is here that we must look for what made Maurice Bowra ultimately so different from Isaiah Berlin, who professed that he had learned so much from him. Oxford's two greatest talkers were close friends. They both could dazzle audiences, and both had a profound interest in foreign cultures. Berlin's sovereign command of Russian language and literature could hardly be matched by Bowra's readings of Russian poetry, but it is impressive that both promoted this literature in an Anglophone environment. Yet what gradually became clear in the relationship between these two men was Berlin's interest in ideas and his breadth of human sympathy. Bowra had neither.

Perhaps the memory of Joseph's tutorials and the abiding feeling of being second-rate kept Bowra away from anything that remotely resembled philosophical thought. His steely carapace of wit and parody constantly impeded him from showing or accepting human warmth. As the years passed, the brilliance of Berlin, the originality of his thinking and the depth of his learning, never faded, as he reached out to an ever larger band of friends and intellectuals whose horizons were all but imperceptible to Bowra. A telling case was Berlin's regard for

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Edmund Wilson, of whom Bowra greatly disapproved. Writing to Noel Annan from Harvard in 1949, Berlin confided that "I secretly see Mr Edmund Wilson with whom (don't tell Maurice) my relations are becoming quite warm." The latest volume of Berlin's correspondence, vastly enlarged after he took up the dictaphone, displays a beguiling openness to people of all sorts and to philosophical ideas. The difference is encapsulated in the titles of their books: Berlin's *Historical Inevitability* or *Two Concepts of Liberty*, by comparison with Bowra's *The Greek Experience* or *Heroic Poetry*.

Not that Bowra was imperceptive. His suspicion of Adam von Trott, the attractive German Rhodes scholar who left golden memories at Balliol before the war, was not irrational, despite von Trott's terrible execution after the plot to kill Hitler. As Mitchell observes, "For some reason, Bowra had a visceral distrust of the man." When von Trott appeared in Oxford to assure Bowra that the members of the German opposition would remove Hitler on their own provided that the Nazis could be left in control of the Sudetenland and Austria, Bowra smelled a rat. The signs that von Trott ultimately turned against Hitler are strong, but equally so are those of his earlier complicity with the Nazis. Even Berlin seems to have questioned the widespread opinion that von Trott had been a martyr. In 1951, David Astor, the editor of *The Observer*, who had admired von Trott since their time together at Balliol, viciously attacked Bowra when he received his knighthood. Berlin rightly saw in Astor's hostility a wholly unwarranted belief that Bowra was somehow responsible for bringing about von Trott's death. It is true that Bowra had written to Felix Frankfurter that he had doubts about von Trott's commitment to oppose Hitler. British intelligence intercepted his letter (and presumably made use of it). It would have put von Trott in an impossible position, but Bowra may have been right. (Justin Cartwright has recently fictionalized the remarkable story in *The Song Before It Is Sung*.)

Although Bowra may have had some indirect influence on war policy, as in the von Trott case, he was not called upon, like so many of his Oxford colleagues, to serve in diplomacy or in intelligence. This meant that he had to endure considerable isolation out of term-time in Oxford, and he clearly resented Berlin's posting to the British Embassy in Washington, where, according to Bowra, he was "pillowed on pink, satin sheets." Many noted Oxonians were breaking codes in Bletchley or picking up rumors in foreign places (John Betjeman in Dublin, Ronald Syme in Istanbul). Bowra, as an old soldier from the previous war, was "deeply anxious to do some war job," as he admitted to Frederick Lindemann.

His friends tried to help, but without success. Bowra's apparent, though not flamboyant, homosexuality may have rendered him untrustworthy, although if he had possessed desirable technical skills, as Alan Turing (another homosexual) had in breaking the Germans' Enigma code, Bowra might have been employed in the war effort just the same. Mitchell is probably right in concluding that "establishment figures, so long mocked and teased in dinner party stories and scurrilous verse, took a terrible revenge."

That scurrilous verse was notorious. When Lloyd-Jones wrote his memorial in 1972, he tempered his account of Bowra's boring prose by alluding to his scabrous poetry: "His least inhibited writing was his occasional verse, and it is sad that little of this is likely to be published while those who can recognize its allusions are alive." By a strange irony, Henry Hardy, the indefatigable editor of Isaiah Berlin's writings, published Bowra's "unpublishable" verse in 2005 from a manuscript left with John Sparrow at All Souls College, under the title *New Bats in Old Belfries*. Bowra's clever, brittle, and obscene parodies can now be read and assessed.

Almost all of them are directed to his contemporaries, and the ones maligning his enemies are unspeakably vicious and small-minded. Even his friends could not have been altogether pleased with the ways in which they were commemorated. His epithalamium on the marriage of Kenneth Clark begins: "Angels of St. James's Park, / Make the bed for Kenneth Clark: / Make it when such loves are sealed / Broad as any battlefield. / When he strips him for the fight / Help him in his work tonight. / See that all the night till morn / No preventative is torn; / Many a useless child may live / From a torn preventative." Bowra's parody of John Betjeman's "Dorset," under the title "Major Prophet," is about none other than Isaiah Berlin. It is hardly an affectionate tribute, although a tribute it is: "See the young girls' enraptured faces / To the adagio listening. / Oh, hark, for sex-appeal is calling / And ripples down those bended necks. / The master calls them to attention, / Unveils the mysteries of sex."

The abundant sexual content of Bowra's poems is so consistently puerile, however smartly phrased, that one has to wonder about his emotional maturity. He had been initiated into gay sex in Germany in 1932 through his friend Adrian Bishop, a Wildean character who finally became an Anglican monk to expiate his sins. Bowra's most elaborate verse parody, "Old Croaker," taking off from T. S. Eliot's "East Coker" and alluding along the way to Milton and Yeats, among others, was a grotesque celebration of Bishop's debauchery: "I will arise and go now and go to have a pee, / Way down in Innisfree. / That's where I wish to be / With a Corporal on my knee. / Oh is it town or gown or tousled hair, / A tousled boy-scout's hair / Inside the WC?" Still, despite his flings in Germany, Bowra's sexual extravagance in Oxford was largely verbal, and as his reputation as the warden of Wadham grew he became increasingly sensitive to being labeled a homosexual—to such an extent that he refused to meet with Jean Genet, who had come to Oxford to receive an honorary degree.

Bowra's pubescent sexuality and sharply honed wit seemed to leave little room for such feelings as tenderness or compassion, to say nothing of love. Yet there is one hint of such emotion in the aftermath of his German experience of 1932. He had been introduced to members of the circle of the poetic guru Stefan George, who exalted the boy he called Maximin into the muse of his poetry. (Oddly, Mitchell insists on spelling the poet's name George without the final "e," but then his German seems shaky since he translates *wahrscheinlich* as "truly" instead of "probably.") Bowra went on to introduce George's work to English readers, and in 1934 he met in Oxford one of the poet's most distinguished disciples, the medieval historian Ernst Kantorowicz, author of a magisterial biography of Frederick the Second and *The King's Two Bodies*, a hugely influential study of medieval political theory. A personal friendship of such intensity and longevity ensued that Mitchell reasonably suspects the two became lovers.

Kantorowicz prescribed that all Bowra's letters to him be destroyed upon his death, and so we are deprived of seeing what Bowra wrote, but a letter from Kantorowicz to Bowra survives with thanks for a photo of the young Bowra in his "buggerable days." This might be simple playfulness, of course, but it is remarkable that a transatlantic relationship between the two, including European travel together, lasted for several decades—when Kantorowicz was in California at Berkeley and then at the Institute for Advanced Study in Prince-

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ton. As an executor of his estate, Ralph Giesey has testified that when Kantorowicz died in 1963 there were three photographs beside his bed. One was of his mother, another of Stefan George, and the third of Maurice Bowra. This is the only glimpse we have today of any kind of deep emotional attachment in the entire course of Bowra's life. Soon after Kantorowicz's death, Bowra wrote to Felix Frankfurter that "my own debt to him is incalculable. He stirred my intelligence, bolstered my morale, amused me with dazzling paradoxes and intuitions and formulations."

For those of Bowra's old friends who outlived him, he was difficult in his last years. He became deaf and demanding. Even so generous and forgiving a person as Berlin clearly had problems in coping with him as time passed. Already in 1954 Berlin wrote to Sparrow that he avoided invitations when he knew that Bowra would also be present. "I cramp his style," wrote Berlin, "and he knows it—there is nothing I can do about that." Life beyond the warden's lodgings at Wadham was inconceivable for Bowra, who had depended for decades upon college servants. The college prolonged his position for two extra years and then provided rooms for him in a new college building. But it is scarcely surprising that he could not tolerate his new existence, and death came swiftly after he left the wardenship in 1970.

Tacitus wrote, in the biography of his father-in-law Agricola, that persons such as himself who lived on into a different kind of world from the one in which they grew up not only outlived other people but themselves as well: *non modo aliorum sed etiam nostri superstites sumus*. This might well be applied to Bowra. He survived himself. When he died, the glamorous and witty soirées belonged to an irrecoverable past. The naughty poems were already gathering dust. Meanwhile, Isaiah Berlin, with his irrepressible intellect, his passion for ideas, and his friends all over the world, was triumphantly building a reputation to which Bowra could never have aspired. John Sparrow revealed a heartbreaking glimpse of the affection that might have been, when he imagined that on judgment day Bowra himself would divide the dead between the celestial and the nether realms: "Send us to Hell or Heaven or where you will, / Promise us only you'll be with us still: / Without you, Heaven would be too dull to bear, / and Hell will not be Hell if you are there." Mitchell's biography of Bowra serves as a requiem for the Oxford of *Brideshead*. ◆

David A. Bell

THE COLBERT REPORT

THE INFORMATION MASTER: JEAN-BAPTISTE COLBERT'S SECRET STATE INTELLIGENCE SYSTEM
By Jacob Soll
(University of Michigan Press, 277 pp., $65)

That resonant piece of verbal shorthand, TMI—or Too Much Information—would make a fine epigraph for our age. Anyone with an Internet connection today has access to exponentially greater quantities of writing, images, sound, and video than anyone on earth could have imagined just twenty years ago. Small wonder that we have become obsessed with the idea of "information" as an abstract substance independent of its content—something that we accumulate, measure, and "process," rather than ponder and understand. And small wonder that the management and control of information, whether by its "producers," by governments, or by corporations such as Google, has emerged as an increasingly important political concern, and as a subject of scholarship.

This scholarship, in the field of history, has recently taken an intriguingly paradoxical turn. While the extreme availability of information today should presumably have highlighted its relative paucity in earlier periods, historians—most notably Ann Blair—have in fact extended the concept of "information overload" all the way back to the sixteenth century, arguing that while we now associate the phenomenon with the internet, the printing press had a comparable effect. Until its invention, most literate people had access to relatively little written material. They could manage to read literally everything they could get their hands on. After Gutenberg, however, books multiplied rapidly, and soon many libraries became too large for their owners to read more than a small percentage of the texts. It became necessary to devise strategies for dealing with the excess. Scholars invented systems of note-taking, methods of summarizing and skimming, and principles of triage. As Francis Bacon famously remarked: "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested: that is, some books are to be read only in parts; others to be read, but not curiously; and some few to be read wholly, with diligence and attention." That is, among other things, a comment about coping.

We cope in the same way; and anyone who identifies Wikipedia with the end of civilization should be reassured to learn that early modern Europeans already possessed an impressive arsenal of intellectual crutches and shortcuts, some of them quite dubious. By the seventeenth century there already existed a large genre of reference works, compendia, and reading guides, so as to lead the uninitiated through the increasingly dense thickets of learning, sometimes at breakneck speed. Some readers made use of little else, with classical compendia particularly prized for the quick simulacra of learning that they provided. As Jonathan Swift advised young critics, "Get scraps of Horace from your friends, / And have them at your fingers' ends." More serious scholars put together their own guides and reference works. Ann Blair has shown that many of the greatest Renaissance thinkers had no compunction about attacking their books with scissors, cutting and pasting what they considered the crucial passages into commonplace books or card files for easy reference. By illuminating all these systems, methods, and reference works, Blair and her fellow scholars are giving us a new vision of Renaissance learning, grounded not simply in our own reading of the texts, but in an attempt to grasp what people at the time actually knew, and how they knew it.

Printed books and periodicals were not the only form of writing to proliferate wildly in early modern Europe. So did reports, memoranda, briefs, circulars, directives, and all the masses of paper that form the crinkly carapaces of modern governments. By the time of the French Revolution, it had become almost impossible for officials to imagine how earlier ages survived without them. "The ministry is a world of paper," wrote Saint-Just at the height of the Terror. "I don't know how Rome and Egypt governed without this resource." Saint-Just also identified the problems that arose as a result: "Government is impossible with too many words . . . the demon of writing makes war on us, and government stops." In short, early modern government needed information

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management just as much as early modern scholarship did.

The development of state information management might seem a dull subject. Ledgers, account books, and filing systems generally do not make for heroic drama or grand epic. Yet in the hands of Jacob Soll these mundane objects become strangely mesmerizing. A gifted intellectual historian known for a fine book on seventeenth-century French humanism and politics, Soll here shifts his attention to the core of the early modern state, and the attempt by the French monarchy under Louis XIV to establish a new sort of political pre-eminence over its large, diverse, and notoriously fractious nation: what historians today call the project of absolutism. In this process, Soll argues convincingly, officials began consciously to treat the generation, the control, and the management of information as a central instrument of power.

It helps that Soll's story has a genuinely fascinating protagonist. He is Jean-Baptiste Colbert, Louis XIV's chief minister. A ruthless and brilliant parvenu who rose to the commanding heights of French society and became the chief promoter of the economic policies known as mercantilism, Colbert is a well-known historical figure. But Soll reveals a new side of him, casting him as a sort of magnificent obsessive—a practical-minded Casaubon who pursued, throughout his life, an impossible dream of universal knowledge. Colbert, as Soll shows, took inspiration from the humanist scholars who longed to create a usable universal library, but he sought to direct his own information management system toward the single goal of strengthening the French monarchy. He would not collect information in general, but information of use in governing. And instead of making it available to all interested readers, he would hoard it as a valuable commodity, deploying it publicly only when it served the purpose of the state.

In designing this system, Soll argues, Colbert brought together two very different European traditions: not just the forms of information management developed in the humanist Republic of Letters, but also the reporting and accounting systems developed by Europe's great merchant houses. Here one great inspiration came from the Fugger family of Augsburg and its vast sixteenth-century trading empire, which depended on regular news reports from a far-flung network of correspondents (in a very real sense, the first "reporters"), and on sophisticated filing and accounting methods to manage them. Colbert himself came from a mercantile background in eastern France, and had an education appropriate to the milieu, with more attention to calculation and the mysteries of double-entry bookkeeping than to the subtleties of Latin verse.

In his early years, this mercantile background brought Colbert a great deal of scorn, both from the grand aristocrats who dominated the French state and the humanist scholars who advised them. They mocked his vulgar manners, his bourgeois dress (especially his "merchant's collar"), and his literary ignorance. But to Cardinal Mazarin, Richelieu's successor as France's chief minister in the war-torn 1640s, Colbert's talents for managing money spoke more eloquently than the scholars' talent for glossing Tacitus: thanks to him, Mazarin's personal fortune swelled to tens of millions of French pounds, an astonishing sum for the period. While treating Colbert as a sort of glorified servant, Mazarin nonetheless made him his principal accountant and trusted adviser, and then, most crucially, his librarian. The cardinal possessed the largest and best-kept library in France, which would become the core of the royal library, and thus the direct ancestor of today's Bibliothèque Nationale. Colbert grasped that the position gave him privileged access to precisely the sort of information that Mazarin most needed to protect and strengthen the prerogatives of the monarchy against increasingly sharp challenges from at home and abroad.

To understand Colbert's strategies for collecting and managing information, it is necessary to understand something about the Baroque disaster area that was the early modern French state. Soll rightly calls it "staggeringly arcane—a feudal web of laws and taxes." Since the Middle Ages, the French monarchy had allowed layer after layer of institutions, laws, and practices to accumulate, often in competition with each other, and each possessing their own royally guaranteed privileges and responsibilities. The resulting confusion was a dream for lawyers and a nightmare for almost everyone else. France's provinces had one set of boundaries when it came to the authority of royal governors, another when it came to legal jurisdictions, another when it came to royal tax collecting, and still others for excise taxes, internal tariffs and Catholic dioceses. Enlightenment commentators repeatedly likened the structure to a huge half-ruined mansion, and dreamed of blowing it up and starting again from scratch. (It is small wonder that the first great project of the French Revolutionary state was the literal demolition of that hated symbol of royal power, the Bastille.) But the kings of the Old Regime, however "absolute" their supposed authority, could not simply call in the wrecking ball, because their regime, always skating the edge of bankruptcy, depended on the revenue gleaned from the complex and confusing web of privileges that ambitious subjects remained ever willing to pay for.

In this context, the single most valuable sort of information for the government concerned precedents. What share of its tax revenues did a particular town owe to the central state? How much had it actually turned over in the past? Who had the right to name its aldermen? How much could be charged for the privilege? What right did its courts have to interpret or obstruct royal legislation? What had taken place in previous disputes? If the crown controlled the sources of information on such questions, it could resolve disputes in its own favor without incurring the charges of arbitrary rule and despotism that might destroy confidence in the system altogether.

Mazarin made good use of Colbert's talents in this area, and so did Mazarin's pupil King Louis XIV. When Mazarin died in 1661, the twenty-three-year-old Louis declared he would henceforth manage the government himself. But Colbert became chief minister in all but name, and continued to build his state information system. Most immediately, he worked with the king to stifle challenges to royal authority from the obstreperous sovereign courts (*parlements*). And this was only the beginning. In the 1660s, he began to train, and send throughout the country, a cadre of "professional state observers" to put together what amounted to a political fact book of France: population numbers; information on land holdings, regulations and laws; sketches of important personalities; data on economic activity. Soon Colbert expanded his ambitions to include neighboring countries as well. When he sent one observer—his son—to Italy, in 1671, he gave him the following instructions. In each state, he said,

> look at . . . its situation, its military forces, the number of its peoples, the greatness of the state, the number and size of cities, towns, and villages, the quantity of the peoples that compose the whole; the form of State government, and if it is aristocratic . . . of the names and status of noble families that have taken or will take part in governing the Republic; their different

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functions; their general and particular councils; who represents the State, in whom the sovereign power lies and who resolves peace and war, who makes laws; etc … the suffrages collected and the results taken and pronounced; the particular councils for the militia, the admiralty, justice, for the city and for the rest of the State; the laws and the customs under which they live; in what consist the militias meant to guard the main square.… Visit the public works, maritime and on ground, all the palaces, public houses, and generally all that is remarkable.

The letter itself proves that it is in no way anachronistic to apply terms like "information gathering" and "information management" to the seventeenth century.

The letter also gives evidence of Colbert's mania. He worked feverishly, always collecting, filing, and calculating. Soll calls him "a man apparently never happier than when filling out account ledgers." He reserved his anger above all for his son, whom he trained to take his place but who, predictably, could never live up to expectations. "I will visit every night my table and papers," the son promised Colbert obsequiously in 1671, "and I will expedite, before going to bed, that which I can, or I will put aside and send later, before marking, in my agenda that I will keep exactly on my table, the affairs that I will have sent out." But he repeatedly let down his demanding parent, who scolded him with cold fury in 1676: "You must still take care to look after your papers … [as] I asked you to do, and which I still do every day, for you, and which I now find rolled in a desk, in the worst state of filth, in spite of the fact that they contain the quintessence of the spirit of the most accomplished people in the kingdom." Outside the troubled bosom of his family, Colbert showed little emotion, earning the sobriquet of *le nord*—the north—from Madame de Sévigné.

Not surprisingly, Colbert's long-term goal proved impossible to realize. Soll defines it as the idea that "all knowledge, formal and practical, could be used together in one archival system to understand and master the material world." Colbert could no more complete this system than the Renaissance humanists could complete their ideal universal library. Indeed, Louis XIV finally concluded that it was better not even to try, lest the attempt end up placing excessive power in hands other than his own. In 1683, after Colbert's sudden death (probably from a kidney stone), the king dismantled the system, and spread the responsibilities of information collecting and management among different ministries. Soll suggests, quite plausibly, that in doing so Louis "hobbled" the French state, making it even less possible to manage and setting it on the path to the mammoth bankruptcy and breakdown that, a century later, would usher in the French Revolution.

Yet Colbert did accomplish a great deal. He bought whole libraries and archives, and by the time of his death, the royal library had tripled in size, housing some 36,000 books and 10,500 manuscripts. His aides produced by far the most systematic and detailed descriptions of the country ever attempted, and for the first time in history the "nation" of France began to come into focus as a social unity that could be managed and transformed by political action. Colbert trained a cadre of talented officials to implement all these projects. He also enlisted some of the most gifted intellectuals of the day to help, including Charles Perrault, the famous author of fairy tales, and the academician Jean Chapelain. And he made excellent use of the information that he harvested, particularly against the principal sources of domestic resistance to the king's absolutist project: the *parlements* and the Catholic church. In 1682 he deployed his vast erudition to ensure wide support for measures subjecting the church to an unprecedented degree of state control.

Colbert also worked to restrict the public flow of information, and here he set particularly long-lasting precedents. He made secrecy his byword, and insisted that no one outside government had any right to a knowledge of its workings—particularly its financial workings. Soll depicts him at work ensuring that no Paris printer could learn Greek or Latin without official approval, so that potentially seditious classical scholarship would remain under close surveillance. He shows Colbert striving to suppress Richard Simon's pioneering critical treatment of the Old Testament—one of the first attempts to treat Scripture as a historical text—and promoting the idea that "history should serve only to conserve the splendor of the King's enterprises." While Louis XIV abandoned other elements of Colbert's information system, he happily retained all of these.

Soll tells this story in wonderfully lucid prose, and with a great gift for concision. Colbert emerges from his pages not only as the patron saint of modern bureaucrats, but as a forceful—if somewhat repellent—personality, and as another of the great early modern figures who sought to gain unprecedented knowledge of, and mastery over, the material world. What Galileo and Newton strove for in natural science, and Hobbes and Montesquieu in political science, Colbert, we now see, pursued in the less glorious but still vital realm of management and paperwork. In revealing this side to the minister, Soll has made a major contribution to our understanding of early modern history.

The principal criticism to be leveled at the book—a distinctly odd one, for an academic monograph—is that there is not enough of it. Even Soll's talent for concision does not save some chapters from feeling sparse, and Colbert's great enterprise devoid of a thicker and richer context. Soll does give tantalizing glimpses of this context. He knows the precedents for Colbert's projects well—especially those carried out by Italian and Spanish monarchs. He discusses them clearly,

Charivari

Fold the bed-sheet,
cross your fingers—
this lie you are
looks set to linger,

like a rumour
or the smell
of last night's dinner—
Wash the dishes,

cross your fingers,
hope the story
won't be questioned—
hope some more

when someone listens
(while you scrub
so your skin glistens,
whistling)

Difficult
to keep hidden,
bad blood leaks
around what's given—

the bastard caste-
mark on your forehead
is déclassé
and whorish red

So cross your fingers,
clap and count—
till superstition
finds you out

FIONA SAMPSON

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if briefly, and shows how Colbert's ambitions outstripped those of his predecessors. He also gives a brief, intriguing sense of how the story continued in the eighteenth century and afterward. But here, particularly, some important issues could have used fuller attention.

Following the French historian Roger Chartier, Soll suggests that the more the absolute monarchy became associated with secrecy, the more its opponents deployed the banner of "publicity" to resist it, seeking to promote both the free circulation of information and free debate about what that information meant. The antithesis of Colbert's philosophy of state secrecy came in the visions of a public sphere of free, rational, critical debate developed in the eighteenth century by writers such as Malesherbes, Condorcet, and Kant. As Soll astutely points out, this dialectical relationship between secrecy and publicity makes the state a much more important actor in the development of the early modern public sphere than most of its historians (who have principally studied the institutions of the sphere itself, such as salons and coffee houses) have recognized.

Soll then gestures toward the modern consequences of the story. "Even for the most open of democracies," he writes, "the culture of state secrecy is necessary and potent, but at the same time, in its very essence, perverse and dangerous." True enough, but while such sentences conjure up images of a malevolent Dick Cheney, the true modern heirs of Colbert's information system did not work in the office of the American vice president, but in Hitler's Chancellery, in Stalin's Kremlin, and in the East German Ministry of State Security, infamously known as the Stasi. It was in the bulging files that the Stasi insanely tried to compile on each and every East German citizen, enlisting a substantial proportion of the population to spy on the rest (and each other), that Colbert's dream of encyclopedic information came closest to realization. Since the collapse of communism, the spirit of Colbertism lingers on in such places as Moscow, Beijing, and Teheran. And it is in such places that dissidents are now deploying the tools of the current information revolution, from e-mail to Facebook to Twitter, to establish a new public sphere in defiance of state secrecy.

What distinguishes democracy from authoritarian rule, on the level of information systems, is that in democracy such systems have the double purpose of informing the state about its citizens and its citizens about the state. What is at stake here is the principle of accountability. In absolutist France, the state's agents were ultimately accountable to no one but the king. Colbert's system, with its accompanying bureaucracy and paperwork, allowed the state to keep watch on civil society, but not the reverse. Democratic societies, however, demand this reversal. As the historian Ben Kafka has recently shown, French revolutionaries in 1789 made public accountability a key demand, and wrote it into the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. From now on, Saint-Just's "demon of writing" would provide a public record of the state's doings, and therefore help to protect citizens against the abuses of its agents. Modern bureaucracies remain riven by this tension between the two purposes of "public information."

More broadly, Soll does not engage explicitly enough with the large, fascinating question of how the control of information relates to the control of knowledge. He deals at great length with one of Colbert's minions, a certain Joseph-Nicolas Foucault, but another Foucault, the philosopher Michel, lurks ineluctably in the background of any book of this sort. Foucault's famous work on knowledge and power mostly investigated very different issues from the kind of information management that Soll explores. It showed the ways that the naming of things, the categorization of knowledge, and the construction of "discourses" can radically shape the field of human action. In his later years, Foucault brought this perspective to bear more closely on questions of governance, looking at how practices of categorization and discipline work through institutions to shape and control individual "subjects" (what he called "governmentality"). But his orientation toward philosophical problems rather than historical ones, and his tendency to see "discourses" and practices as all-encompassing and uniform, make it difficult for his work to explain actual processes of historical change. For this reason, careful historians still tend to shy away from invoking him too sweepingly.

Yet Soll's fine book makes clear that Colbert's ministry represented not only a crucial stage in the development of state information management, but also something new in the broader history of ideas. The mercantile perspective the minister brought to bear on statecraft and scholarship was, despite the mirage of universal knowledge it came bound up with, deeply utilitarian. When trying to understand and to evaluate the information that he so assiduously collected and organized, Colbert applied a single clear criterion: its practical use-value to the French state. In a world of statesmen and scholars obsessed with fame, glory, and eternal salvation, the introduction of such a perspective at the very summit of the state represented a significant change. Colbert may have been a quintessential figure of the Old Regime in his attachment to royal power and noble privilege, but in his utilitarian and empirically minded way of thinking he was nothing less than a precursor of the Enlightenment. Soll notes that the great *Encyclopedia* of Diderot and d'Alembert made reference to Colbert no less than 143 times.

The path from Colbert to the Enlightenment needs further investigation. So, for that matter, does the path to the Enlightenment from the scholarly forms of information management studied by historians such as Blair. How does our relationship to formal knowledge change when we do not read through a book from start to finish, submitting ourselves to its logic and authority—when we impose our own organizational scheme on it through sophisticated forms of note-taking and the use of reference guides? The suddenness and completeness of the shift from one form of reading to another should not be exaggerated, but the phenomenon still has clear importance to the development of what we call, however imperfectly, modernity. The still more radical challenge to reading posed by the electronic dissemination of texts likewise promises, in the long run, to have profound effects on our broader intellectual universe.

The great irony about Colbert is that the ways of knowing that he championed would ultimately prove incompatible with the social and political values that he defended. He himself, of course, did not see any contradiction between a utilitarian perspective and a system of absolute monarchy grounded in the divine right of kings, brutal religious intolerance, and social privilege; but later generations would see a flagrant contradiction, and act decisively to resolve it. In this sense, the aristocrats and the scholars who saw Colbert as an alien, threatening presence in their midst had things exactly right. It is true, as Jacob Soll claims, that in the short term the French monarchy benefited from Colbert's ministrations, and might have benefited still more if his "system" had persisted after his death. From another perspective, however, he was less the state's servant than one of its gravediggers. ◆

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Continued from page 2

calls into question my "sunny view of the progress of theology," it isn't clear whom he's arguing with. Not me.

Misrepresentation #3: Belligerence and tolerance in the Koran. The rhetorical technique shown above—attributing to me views I don't in fact hold, then attacking those views with arguments I myself make—is a favorite of Coyne's. As if in refutation of me, he writes: "Moreover, there is no evidence for an increase in morality in the Qur'an over the years of its composition between 610 and 632 C.E. On the contrary: As Islamic scholars recognize, the later chapters, written after Muhammad's famous flight from Mecca to Medina, display decidedly less tolerance than the earlier ones." No kidding! I guess that would explain why I write that "the earlier suras, revealed in Mecca, tended to be more tolerant." It would also explain why Chapter 15 is titled "Mecca" and features tolerant verses—and ends with the ominous sentence, "Muhammad was about to acquire real power, and things were about to change"—whereas the subsequent two chapters ("Medina" and "Jihad") feature belligerent verses. That my book acknowledges any belligerence in the Koran may surprise readers of Coyne's review. Coyne says I find "tolerance of Christians and Jews" in the Koran by using a "needle-in-the-haystack" approach, and he then sets out to enlighten me about the many intolerant Koranic passages. His first example is this: "O you who believe! Do not take the Jews and the Christians for friends; they are friends of each other."

As it happens, the same passage can be found in my book. Why didn't Coyne know this? Maybe he was confused by the fact that I used a different translation. ("O Believers! take not the Jews or Christians as friends. They are but one another's friends.") Or, maybe, his eyes never fell on that particular page—or on the pages where I quote numerous other belligerent Koranic passages. (I argue that some of these verses, when read in context, are less indiscriminately belligerent than they may sound. Coyne probably disagrees, judging by his attitude toward Islam generally, and I'd be interested in hearing his counterarguments.)

Misrepresentation #4: Muhammad's God. In addition to misunderstanding me, Coyne misunderstands the Koran. He writes: "It is nice of Wright to remark [in reference to a particular Koranic passage] that Jews and Christians will gain salvation so long as they believe in God, but he fails to mention that this saving God is the Islamic god, Allah." Coyne's assumption that Muhammad thought of Allah as different from the God of Christians and Jews is popular among laypeople (especially on the right), but it's not very popular among scholars of Islamic history. In the Koran, Muhammad explicitly says he's talking about the God of Christians and Jews, and he repeatedly grounds the history of that God in the Torah and the Gospels. In the theological arguments Muhammad had with Jews or Christians, there's no evident disagreement over the identity of God himself. In fact, contrary to the popular accounts of Islamic history with which Coyne may be familiar, chances are good that Arab Christians and Jews referred to God as Allah.

Coyne will now be given a chance to reply to this. In the likely event that I find his reply in need of corrective comment, I'll post my comment at www.evolutionofgod.net/coyne—where, again, readers can find a fuller list of Coyne's misrepresentations of my book. Together, these misrepresentations form the foundation of most of his criticism of the book. If Coyne wants to write a devastating review of *The Evolution of God*—and he sure seems to want to—he'll have to start over.

ROBERT WRIGHT

Jerry A. Coyne responds:

ROBERT WRIGHT FAILS TO respond to my main criticism: that there is no "scientific" evidence for a transcendent force which, by coupling social interaction to theological change, pulls humanity toward ever greater morality. Instead, his defense rests on selectively quoting his own book. (I've posted a longer response at http://whyevolutionistrue.wordpress.com/2009/09/13/response-to-robert-wright/.)

I'll take up Wright's four points in order.

1. While Wright asserts that the origin of monotheism was attended by belligerence, his book states unequivocally that the adoption of monotheism was critical in our march toward moral progress: "To the extent that we can tell, the one true God—the God of Jews, then of Christians, and then of Muslims—was originally a god of vengeance. Fortunately, the previous sentence has a hidden asterisk: *But it doesn't matter.* The salvation of the world in the twenty-first century may well hinge on how peaceful and tolerant Abrahamic monotheism is. But it doesn't hinge on whether these attributes were built in at monotheism's birth. That's because monotheism turns out to be, morally speaking, a very malleable thing, something that, when circumstances are auspicious, can be a fount of tolerance and compassion. As we'll see in later chapters, this fact is manifest in the subsequent history of Jews, Christians, and Muslims."

2. Although Wright denies claiming that Paul extended Christian love to those of other faiths, his book states this several times. One example: "Actually, though Paul doesn't say 'Love your enemies,' he comes pretty close. So close, in fact, as to suggest that he *did* sense the logic behind it—that, in fact, he may be the one who injected the idea into Christian literature."

3 & 4. Wright seems not to recognize that Islam—which ultimately gave precedence to divisive over amiable theology and sanctified the decidedly belligerent post-Koranic hadith—violates his own thesis of long-term theological progress. And, while he recognizes some antipathy in the Koran, Wright downplays it. For example, he cherry-picks a Koranic verse in which Muhammad considers Islam's god identical to that of Christians and Jews. But he fails to mention verses insisting that salvation is attainable only by worshipping God in an Islamic way. Twice, for example, it specifies that anyone who considers Jesus as the son of God will roast in the fires of hell.

Wright can selectively quote himself like this, because his book repeatedly hedges on some pretty fundamental points. Although claiming to reject mystical forces, Wright constantly reassures us that biology and history exude scientific evidence for a "larger purpose" and "a special creative explanation." This pervasive waffling makes it easy for him to claim that any interpretation of his book is wrong. ◆

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Washington Diarist

With Respect to What

Travel westward along Massachusetts Avenue, down from Capitol Hill, and you will run into Edmund Burke. He seems to be hailing a cab, hand raised high, fingers parted, his whole form tense with the attempt to seize your attention; but in fact he is in mid-expostulation. This is the torsion of argument. The bronze statue, a copy of a late nineteenth-century one that stands in Bristol, which Burke immortally represented in Parliament, is eight feet tall, and was presented to Washington in 1922 by a British organization devoted to Anglo-American comity. Inscribed on its pedestal is a sterling sentence—"magnanimity in politics is not seldom the truest wisdom," in the capital usually honored in the breach—from the conclusion to Burke's speech in 1775 on "conciliation with the colonies," which is the greatest speech I have ever read. The statue's location is a fine emblem of the local polyphony: a block away is the memorial to Samuel Gompers, glumly in bronze, who sits beneath a turgid company of allegorical figures, which contrasts unfavorably with the animated lucidity of Burke's image. The progressive monument shows a fasces, the conservative monument shows a tricorn hat. And a few steps up the street is the libertarian glasswork of the Cato Institute—in a certain light Burke seems almost to be castigating it. In 1967, in a worshipful book about Burke, Russell Kirk ominously declared that "if, in the near future, this Burke statue still stands in deathless bronze on Massachusetts Avenue; and if its original … still stands at Bristol … —why, they will remain as symbols of a human order that has not been pulled down altogether." Well, it still stands, on a grassy island amid the traffic of an unapocalyptic city in which nothing can pull down human order, or disorder.

We are in the middle of yet another Burke revival. Jon Meacham, who relies on the identification of trends for his professional survival, ruled so last spring. The evidence is everywhere. Sam Tanenhaus smartly explains the fate of American conservatism as a contest between Burkeans and "revanchists." David Brooks calls President Obama a Burkean, though Thomas Sowell disagrees. In merry complicity with his own manipulation, Brooks tells of David Axelrod greeting him in the White House with a copy of *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in his hand. (No doubt liberal columnists are met with *On Liberty*.) A few years ago Arnold Schwarzenegger invoked a school of political thought that he unforgettably described as "Schwarzenegger, Edmund Burke, [and John] Kennedy." In a CNN discussion of health care hysteria last summer, Mary Matalin spoke obscurely of "Edmund Burke–type linguistics." Even Patrick Leahy cited the right's idol in a speech on government reform. And so on. (I do not include George Will in the fashion, because he really is a Burkean and has the study to prove it.) Many decades ago Kirk noted with some astonishment that "nowadays Burke is praised in such journals as The New Republic." I am happy, in the spirit of the subject, to conserve the tradition of the house.

The question of Burke is the question of change. It is no wonder that he is back now. Whether or not it is Burkeanism that moves Obama, the scale of his plans are an incitement to its reconsideration. But if Burkeanism means a hostility to change, then Burke was himself not a Burkean. "At once to preserve and to reform": here is the other great dialectical thinker about modern politics. "We compensate, we reconcile, we balance." On America and on India, Burke espoused drastic historical action. Conor Cruise O'Brien, of genuinely blessed memory, may have liberalized Burke a little too much in *The Great Melody*, but he was correct, I think, that Burke's "one constant target" was the abuse of power. And for all his celebrated traditionalism, Burke unflaggingly championed rational deliberation: "In a free country every man thinks he has a concern in all public matters; that he has a right to form and a right to deliver an opinion upon them. They sift, examine, and discuss them … Your whole importance, therefore, depends upon a constant, discreet use of your own reason; otherwise you and your country sink to nothing." Or, more poetically, "mind must conspire with mind." Tradition, in Burke's category-shattering complexity, was in its way the history of public reason, and therefore not to be trifled with. Liberals should welcome a notion of truth as additive and accumulative. It may be objected that reason cannot operate adequately without abstraction, which was what Burke most loathed; but still his fidelity to received understandings must not be mistaken for a vindication of prejudice and unexamined conviction.

What Burke demanded, rather, was circumspection about the motive for, and the pace of, change. Caution is not a sign of "reaction"; and the long annals of left-wing incaution, of the degradation of reform by revolution, should humble some of Burke's despisers. The Burkean retort to the call for change is, with respect to what? The idea of changing everything and the idea of changing nothing are both merciless, and unempirical, and futile for politics. We are all Burkeans and all not Burkeans, all preservers and all reformers, all liberals and all conservatives; we all have our preferred acceptances and our preferred remedies; we all do not wish to create or to destroy the world. We must all climb down from our glittering generalities and justify what we propose in the particular. Concrete change is the only change we can believe in. (Obama has a peculiar relation to concreteness: he floats above it, in the empyrean of his diction, until he collapses into expediency.) The question, are you for change?, is like the question, are you happy?: an emotional set-up, an invitation to mistake a mood for an analysis. The only right answer to such a question is yes and no. To fulfill our desire we must disaggregate it. In the matter of health care, the Democrats are learning this lesson, reluctantly; but the Republicans are now in a frenzy (or as Burke has it, a phrenzy) of aggregation, in wanton opposition to everything. It is not Burkean to declare, as William Kristol did again the other day, that "there is no health care crisis." Such a view is an affront to Burke's teaching about the significance of "circumstance," and to his undoctrinal and uncomplacent tone. It preserves, but it does not reform. Anyway, the preservation of our ills is not what we mean by tradition.

Leon Wieseltier

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